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Alberto Elena

The Cinema of ABBAS KIAROSTAMI

Translated from the Spanish by
Belinda Coombes

SAQI
in association with
Iran Heritage Foundation

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I don't know why the good nature of horses
and the beauty of pigeons have won repute,
why no vulture is kept as a pet.
Clover yields nothing to the poppy's scarlet.
We need to rinse our eyes and view
everything in a different light.
We should cleanse our words
to be both wind and rain.

Sohrab Sepehri

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Preface

This book was first published in its original Spanish version in the autumn of 2002, and was presented in the context of the major retrospective of Kiarostami's work organized by the Gijón 40th International Film Festival, attended by the director himself. Although there had been several previous meetings (Madrid, 1993; Tehran, 1994 and 2000; Turin, 2001) during the long development and preparation of this monograph, this occasion actually represented the first – and belated – opportunity to talk with Kiarostami in a relaxed and appropriate setting. Beyond all doubt, the initial project would not have gone ahead without the director's exceptional and consistent goodwill and the help he gave me on certain particular points over the course of time; but the meeting at Gijón proved decisive in consolidating the interpretative approach that this book represents. The only possible way to begin this book is by expressing my deepest and most sincere gratitude to Abbas Kiarostami himself. Nothing I could add would do justice to the extent of my debt to him.

This volume, suitably adapted and updated, is a description and analysis of the film work of Abbas Kiarostami; but it is not – and

was never intended to be – neutral or detached. For better or worse, this book is an *interpretation* of Kiarostami's work, an interpretation that might well be debatable and even controversial, but which seeks to offer a coherent image of the director and his films. In contrast to the frequent exaggeration of Western references in other analyses of Kiarostami's work (an approach that is in general as self-satisfied as it is redundant), the aim of this book depends more on the reconstruction of the context and the native connotations of his work, an approach that is probably more appropriate in arriving at an understanding of some of the more obscure recesses of his films. In any event, I have therefore made a special effort to pay attention to Iranian sources (wherever the inevitable difficulties of language did not make this impossible) and to contemplate Kiarostami's work within the context of a rich artistic and intellectual Persian tradition, which undoubtedly nourishes him. The restrictions imposed not only by limited space but also by common sense have curbed any vain attempt at an exhaustive study, and the footnotes are often therefore the way in which I have offered references for further research and alternative points of view, which I did not have room to develop *in extenso* in the main text.

It is likewise hardly necessary to make clear that the bibliography at the end of the book is not intended to be an all-inclusive list of publications about Kiarostami, but only those of a certain weight or interest, which can guide readers in further investigation, rather than simply burying them in a jumble of indiscriminate references. As far as the filmography is concerned, I have made great efforts to reduce the numerous errors that exist in practically all those in circulation, but even where the results are judged to be moderately satisfactory, readers must allow a reasonable margin for new and later corrections, particularly concerning the early and lesser-known films by the director.

With the same objective in mind of making this book in particular and Kiarostami's work in general as accessible as possible to readers, I have chosen to use approximate phonetic transcriptions of names and titles originally in Farsi, instead of the more obscure academic transliterations. I have kept to the original spellings

only in the bibliographical references, believing that the resulting inconsistency is nevertheless a minor problem compared with the later difficulties that readers might otherwise face in searching for a reference in catalogues and bibliographical indexes.

Finally, with regard to the extracts from Kiarostami's poems that I have used as headings to each chapter: they are all taken from his anthology *With the Wind* (2000), and perhaps it is not entirely inappropriate to link them to his film work. The innocent little game of giving these same chapters and their subsections titles from great films by other directors (Bertolucci, Mehrjui, Wajda, Kurosawa, Bergman, Passer ...) is not, of course, intended to establish any cinematic relationship with Kiarostami's work, but, once again, I hope it may be evocative. As for Sepehri's poem at the beginning of this book, I am quite sure that any attentive reader will easily perceive its relevance.

During the writing of this book, which has taken considerably longer than intended, many colleagues and friends have rendered invaluable assistance and it is only right to recognize my debt to them in these pages. Information and material in many forms were kindly provided on various occasions by Nadereh Farzam-Nia, Toni García, Catherine Gautier, Ana Goy, Gema Martín Muñoz, Fatemeh Massumi, Mariano Mestman, Luis Miranda, Marta Muñoz Aunión, David Oubiña, Natalia Pérez Galdós, Michael Price, Bárbara Rodríguez Montero, Heliodoro San Miguel, Julián Sauquillo, Alissa Simon, Marlene Smith, Eduardo de la Vega Alfaro, Nuria Vidal, Manuel Vidal Estévez and Breixo Viejo. For their part Alberto Barbera, José Luis Cienfuegos, Giuseppe Gariazzo, José Luis Martínez Montalbán, Jaime J. Pena, Chema Prado, Elisa Resegotti, Bea Szykulska and Antonio Weinrichter are raised to the category of friendly 'accomplices' who, on all kinds of occasions, always gave me the most welcome support in continuing my investigations. Geoff Andrew, Gian Piero Brunetta, Aruna Vasudev and, most especially, Farhad Hakimzadeh and the London Iran Heritage Foundation were instrumental in bringing about the publication of this English edition, and so my gratitude to them could not be warmer or more specific. The thorough and conscientious work of Belinda Coombes,

the translator of this book, will be obvious to readers, but it is also appropriate to emphasize and express my gratitude to her for the enthusiasm that she brought to the task right from the outset.

My colleagues at the Spanish Association of Film Historians (AEHC), who were kind enough to award the original edition of this book the Prize for the Best Book on Cinema published in Spain in 2002, gave added strength – much more than they might have realized – to my confidence in a project that was shown to be incomplete and that now has been given its missing link in the form of this edition. Finally, I would like to make special mention of Mohammad Atebbai: the happy coincidence of working together on the editorial staff at *Film International*, the journal of which he was one of the editors and to which I have had the honour and privilege of contributing over a period of several years, has undoubtedly played a major part in my interest in and dedication to Iranian cinema. His generosity and friendship have, in the final analysis, been the major incentives that have brought this book into being, and it only remains to recognize this fact in public: *motashakkeram*.

This book, in all events, and more than ever, is for Paloma Garbia.

Alberto Elena
July 2004

CHAPTER ONE

Before the Revolution

I have come along with the wind
on the first day of summer
The wind will carry me away
on the last day of autumn.
Abbas Kiarostami

A Place in the World

'I don't like giving interviews [...], because I am always left feeling that I've said nothing interesting. My real aim is to avoid them; then I do feel very relieved.'[1] Much has changed, obviously, since Abbas Kiarostami described himself in these terms so long ago, in 1978; but certainly this timidity, laconic style or reserve, this particular component of the traditional art of *taqiyé* (discretion, dissimulation) have long characterized his career. Even now, Kiarostami is extraordinarily reserved about many areas that might be termed biographical or personal. He confines himself

to repeating a few facts and basic items of information that have long been in circulation; at times he even offers differing or even contradictory versions of the same events. This makes it especially difficult – at least in comparison with other more communicative film-makers – to compile his biography and in particular to throw light on some of its more important episodes. In common with all the biographical studies of Kiarostami available to date, this book is a tentative reconstruction, which uses the film-maker himself as its primary information source.

Born in Tehran on 22nd June 1940 into a large family from the northern region of Gilan, Abbas Kiarostami – of this we can be certain – did not have a particularly happy childhood. The son of a painter and interior decorator, he may well have inherited from the latter his inclination towards visual art forms, although he has more than once admitted that as a child, his painting mainly served to combat his loneliness.[2] Abbas was an introverted child with communication problems, and throughout his basic education he never talked to any of his classmates.[3] We know from later chance references that he even ran away from home at sixteen, although it is difficult to assess the importance of this escapade.[4] In any event, two years later he left home for good, working in the traffic police until he succeeded in gaining a place – after one failed attempt – in the Faculty of Fine Arts of Tehran University. Having to combine his studies with work, now in the Department of Traffic Management of Tehran, he took a long time to graduate.[5] Once, when asked whether he really learned anything at university, Kiarostami did not hesitate: 'Yes, I learned that I was definitely not made to be a painter.'[6]

Kiarostami's real discovery during his university years was, however, graphic design, which was also to direct his first professional steps as an artist. At first he worked in designing book covers and advertising posters, and became fascinated by this 'minimalist aspect of graphic design [...], an art that communicates its message to the general public with the minimum of means and the maximum of constraints'.[7] But then, in 1960, he was employed by the leading advertising film agency of the time, Tabli Films, and during that

decade he dedicated his efforts increasingly to this area. According to Kiarostami himself, he made one hundred to one hundred and fifty film advertisements over a seven- or eight-year period,[8] forging a solid reputation; he finally left the profession, however, dissatisfied with its overriding commercial pressures.[9] Kiarostami's tangential links with the cinema were reinforced by his work designing film credits, which he started in 1967: *Satan's Temptation* (*Vasvase-haye sheitan*, Mohammad Zarrindast, 1967), *The Emperor* (*Ghaisar*, Massud Kimiai, 1969), *Reza, the Motorcyclist* (*Reza motori*, Massud Kimiai, 1970), *The Window* (*Panjereh*, Jalal Moghadam, 1970), etc. His affinity for this kind of work does not appear to have been anything extraordinary, however, and (although this is often claimed) he did not join the Centre for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults in 1969 on the strength of his cinematographic experience, but on the strength of his reputation as a graphic designer. In fact, he was actually employed to illustrate an edition of a children's book by the great poet Ahmad Reza Ahmadi.

Some of Kiarostami's most confusing and even contradictory statements relate precisely to this area of his film vocation and training. 'Apart from a short stay in Prague when I went to see amazing films in a strange language', he declared in 1990, 'I don't think I've seen more than fifty films in my entire life.'[10] On various occasions he has recalled how his real interest began only when he was thirteen or fourteen, with the arrival of neo-realist Italian films in Iran. These came as a breath of fresh air to the anxious adolescent used to seeing only commercial American films; for the first time he could see on the screen people who were recognizably like those he saw in everyday life.[11] However, in his longest commentary on this subject (a personal article written at the request of *Positif* magazine in 1994), Kiarostami expanded on a previous hint: what really interested him in many of these films was not De Sica but Sophia Loren ...[12] Again, in the same article, he expressed his admiration for Fellini and *La dolce vita*, a film that made a 'deep and completely different impression' from any film he had seen before.[13] Two years previously, however, Kiarostami had said something quite unlike the above in the same magazine: 'I often went to the cinema when I

was young, and I remember being deeply impressed by the Italian neo-realists, especially by Rossellini'.[14] This (apparent) lack of consistency is nothing unusual in Kiarostami; it also extends to his judgements and opinions about film-makers such as Dreyer, Bresson or Godard, whose influence on his films one way or another Kiarostami seems equally ready to accept or deny.[15]

Kiarostami's praise in recent times for various foreign colleagues has been lavish and his recognition of profound cinematic influences marked,[16] yet for most of his career the tendency has been quite the opposite. In an important interview published in the daily journal of the 8th Tehran Fajr International Film Festival in 1990, Kiarostami not only declared his ignorance of *cinéma vérité* or Dreyer's work, for example, but also insisted that he does not choose which films to go and see on the strength of on the name of the director. He also flatly denied the influence of any foreign film or director.[17] Obviously, one might think that Kiarostami's tastes and opinions will have evolved with the passage of time and, of course, his growing knowledge of contemporary cinema, and that this would explain his changing opinions. In the end, it does not really matter how deep-rooted Kiarostami's film vocation was nor what stages it went through before and after his debut as a film-maker. There are nevertheless two fundamental points to make about Kiarostami's bursting unexpected into the film-making world on joining the Centre for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults at the end of the 1960s. First, it is quite certain that Kiarostami became a film-maker without any particular training (or even motivation), almost by chance, making a virtue of the necessities of his daily work. Second – as he himself finally recognized at the insistence of the interviewer in the often-quoted 1990 interview – the New Iranian Cinema of the time was really his only influence as he began to shoot his first films in the 1970s. *A Simple Event* (*Yek ettefagh-e sadeh*, 1973) by Sohrab Shahid Saless, *The Mongols* (*Mogholha*, 1973) by Parviz Kiamiavi, together with certain elements from *The Postman* (*Postchi*, 1973) by Dariush Mehrjui, the contemporary films of Massud Kimiai or the early

films of his friend Amir Naderi should therefore be recognized as Kiarostami's real cinematographic references.[18]

Kiarostami is very down-to-earth, in fact, when he talks about his entry to the film world under the protective umbrella of the Centre for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults: 'Before I could decide whether I wanted to do it or fantasize about becoming a film director or even question my own motives, I had already joined the Centre. There I was, everything was set up, and that is how I found myself directing my first film.'[19] This was *Bread and Alley*, a splendid short of just over ten minutes, which not only represented a personal adventure for the novice Kiarostami but also served to launch the activities of the Centre's recently created film section. The Centre, which was to play such a definitive role in the hatching and development of the New Iranian Cinema both before and after the Islamic Revolution,[20] was in fact founded in 1965 on the initiative of the Shah's wife. Its objective was to set up a large children's library in Tehran and to promote the production and publication of reading material suitable for children and adolescents. The Centre began publishing the following year, and in 1969 produced thirteen titles with a print run of 30,000–40,000 in the first editions alone (there were frequent reprints). The success of this and other similar activities, together with growing international recognition (awards from the Bologna Book Fair, etc.), encouraged those in charge to set up a film-making section. The Centre had, however, no budget or proper equipment. In order to raise the minimum necessary funds, it invited the Grand Circus of Moscow to perform in Iran, and used the takings to equip a basic film-making studio at the institute's headquarters in Laleh Park.[21]

The idea of creating a film-making section at Kanun (as the Centre is widely known in Iran, meaning 'Centre' or 'Institute') arose as an extension of the activities of some of its graphic artists, such as Farshid Mesqali and Arapik Baghdasarian, who were keen to try their hand at film animations. Four animated shorts duly appeared in 1970, at the same time as *Bread and Alley* and three other fictional works launched their own contribution to this new 'sideline'. All these productions were very well received, and the

Tehran 5th International Festival of Films for Children and Young Adults awarded the main prize to Kanun's film-making section, for three of the animated shorts and for Kiarostami's work. This public recognition immediately converted the film-making department into one of the main pillars of the Centre; it produced an increasing number of films every year (soon to include medium- and full-length features) and diversified its activities in the audiovisual field.[22]

Kiarostami joined Kanun in 1969 at the express invitation of its director, Firuz Shirvanlu, a friend who at the time also ran a film commercial production company and so knew Kiarostami's work in that area well. His arrival therefore coincided with the setting up of the Centre's film-making department, and it is not surprising that, in the absence of any other candidates, Kiarostami should immediately become involved. To make his first (relatively improvised) film, Kiarostami used a script by his younger brother, Taghi Kiarostami, a children's writer whose first book, *The Hero* (*Pahlavi*), had been published by the Centre in 1967. The script was in fact no more than a simple retelling of one of his own childhood experiences, when a large dog frightened him in the alley leading from the local bakery to the family home. *Bread and Alley* is in the first instance, then, a perceptive and sensitive treatment of that genuine childhood feeling of fear; but of course it goes further than that. As Marco Dalla Gassa has ably pointed out, this modest (but brilliant) short already clearly displays many of the Kiarostami *topoi* that recur insistently in later and better-known works.[23]

The young hero of *Bread and Alley* is sent by his family to buy bread, and alone he must pass a difficult test – the threat of the dog that blocks his way – with ingenuity, tenacity and a good measure of courage. Like so many other of Kiarostami's characters, the protagonist of this first film has a strength of will that carries him inexorably forward, despite the fact that he is alone and ill-equipped to face the dangers he meets. As in later films (in particular, *Where Is the Friend's House?*, which in a multitude of ways revisits the world of *Bread and Alley*), the young hero experiences the harshness of isolation and exclusion from the world of adults, who are too busy with their own affairs to bother about childish dilemmas. When the

boy's first avenue of escape – the help and protection of grown-ups – leads nowhere, he is forced to find his own solutions through his own actions. He must walk towards danger (the menacing dog) and try an extreme measure, which nevertheless proves effective: he throws a piece of bread to the animal to win its confidence, and it then lets him cross the alley in peace. As Laurent Roth says, 'it's the whole ethic of sacrifice and sharing which is laid out here', perhaps as an opportune 'moral' of the film.[24] However, just when the story seems to be over, another child (this time without even a loaf of bread under his arm) bursts into the end of the alley; he will undoubtedly have to find another solution. So the 'moral' of the story must not be mistaken for a schematic formula, rigidly applied.

The final freeze frame (another device we shall see again in Kiarostami's work) in fact places conscious emphasis on the necessary reopening of the adventure, the key to which is once again unknown and which *Bread and Alley* will not this time supply. For a first film, shot with scant resources and indeed with scant knowledge of film-making (a point recognized by Kiarostami on many occasions, remembering his lively arguments with the more experienced director of photography, Mehrdad Fakhimi),[25] *Bread and Alley* nevertheless displays a certain unexpected stylistic maturity. This is particularly true of the film's soundtrack and its use of background music. The film has no dialogue, like many others he made during his years at Kanun,[26] but Kiarostami expertly chooses silence or music to back particular sequences. Silence is used to great effect to underline the dead times, which are also the most important decision-making times for the protagonist, when he must discover for himself the solution (a recurring and important word in Kiarostami's short films) to his dilemma. Still considered one of the prime examples of Kiarostami's early films, this short tale of journeys, encounters, turns of events and solutions remains a genuine collection of many of the film-maker's concerns of theme and form; it also 'had a tremendous role in Kanun's management and policy-making and in shaping the model of Kanun's films'.[27]

Before Kiarostami had perhaps been able to consolidate his

experience with the new medium or even clarify his professional expectations, he made his second short, *Breaktime*, which in many ways constitutes a loose form of diptych with *Bread and Alley*, before embarking on more ambitious projects or going deeper into the complex area of didactic cinema. Alain Bergala underlines this point strongly and clearly: 'Basically, Kiarostami's first two films could be considered as variations of the same structure: a child goes from one place to another using a very familiar route; he comes across an obstacle (a dog, a football match) which stops him in his tracks, but he manages to get past it in the end [...] *Breaktime* has a more universal and far-reaching appeal, however, because it does not confine itself to showing the child's distress or exploring Kiarostami's preoccupation with changes in pace; it introduces for the first time the theme of the sole object of passionate desire (the *idée fixe*) and of relationships within the community.'[28] The passion in this case is for football, a theme that Kiarostami develops magnificently in his first full-length feature, *The Traveller*, and to which he returns in an oblique (but highly significant) way in *Life and Nothing More ...*.[29]

The protagonist of *Breaktime* has been sent home from school for breaking a window with his football, but his passion, his desire, is definitely stronger than his remorse; on his way home, football appears again as a dual symbol, of obstacle and temptation. He is obliged to go home a roundabout way, and his wandering path – typically in Kiarostami's work – is a voyage of discovery. The all-consuming passion of the tenacious young hero is nevertheless inexhaustible. In *Breaktime*, fear has been replaced by the brutal and implacable law of desire, by pure obsession, but the film's young protagonist experiences the same loneliness and isolation as his counterpart in *Bread and Alley*. His punishment and (relative) marginalization at school will be echoed later in the impossibility of his joining the group playing their own version of a football match in the street that he must cross. As Bergala says,[30] his passion systematically isolates him from the community, and he will never overcome it; the strength of his desire never gives way. Hence the bitterness that *Breaktime* strongly exudes, compared with the apparent naivety of *Bread and Alley*.

The boy's roundabout way home has its learning-through-

experience element, but it is definitely a *painful* one. Wandering through the city outskirts, with its rubbish tips and heavy traffic, the protagonist of *Breaktime* perhaps reaches a level of maturity in one respect: he becomes aware of the difficulties and obstacles that life has in store for him, of loneliness and suffering. His physical journey thus takes on a somewhat symbolic connotation – another early example of a feature found in some of the film-maker's later work. At the end of the film, the boy is shown walking along the verge of an unknown road; he has not arrived home and it is impossible to tell when and how he will get there, or what other adventures await him during the upheavals that started with the breaktime bell. It is a masterly ending to Kiarostami's first investigation into objects of desire.

The Law of Desire

With only two shorts behind him and still working within Kanun, Kiarostami embarked in the mid-1970s on two medium-length features, *The Experience* (1973) and *A Suit for the Wedding* (1976), and his first full-length feature, *The Traveller* (1974). All of these more clearly define Kiarostami's universe and his methods at a period in his career that was crucial yet which for various reasons (including, obviously, the restricted circulation of these films) is too little known and undervalued. In the first place, we need to bear in mind that *Breaktime* had been widely criticized for its daring format; this could only undermine the confidence of the still-inexperienced Kiarostami, who fell back for the time being (apparently, at least) on more conventional formulas. Kiarostami himself described the situation with hindsight, in 1999: 'You may not believe it but my ideal film is my second film, *Breaktime*. This film is way ahead of *Taste of Cherry* in terms of form, audacity, avoidance of story-telling, and indeterminate ending. But the reaction of the critics at the time was so incisive and bitter that it hurled me toward recounting a story and making my next film, *The Experience*, which was a love

melodrama [...] The critics had written that I waste state funds and asked that I be sacked from the Centre for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults.'[31] Obviously, this did not happen, thanks to the well-deserved confidence of Kiarostami's superiors in his work.

Kiarostami's comments, while informative about the origins of his first medium-length feature, are definitely unfair to the film, in that one could hardly consider *The Experience* a mere 'love melodrama'. On the contrary, this story of a working-class adolescent, orphaned and impoverished, who works as an errand-boy in a photographer's studio and who falls in love with an older girl from a better-off family, becomes in Kiarostami's hands a real subversion of the 'rules' of a popular sub-genre of Iranian commercial cinema (poor boy loves rich girl).[32] A world away from melodrama, *The Experience* is constructed using a series of dead times, which are the very devices that give the film its meaning and its poetry. It is true that *The Experience*, an adaptation of an original story by Amir Naderi, has a stronger narrative component than that of Kiarostami's previous two films; but it is equally true that Kiarostami effortlessly takes this basic material back onto his own ground.

Amir Naderi was one of the greatest figures of Iranian cinema in the 1970s – later also of the early post-revolutionary period, before he emigrated to the United States at the end of the 1980s. At this time he had made only two films, curious incursions into the film noir genre, *Goodbye, My Friend* (*Khoda hafez, rafiq*, 1972) and *Deadlock* (*Tangna*, 1973), and he was undoubtedly ambitious to embark on more personal projects. The story of *The Experience*, which was unmistakably coloured by personal experience (Naderi came from a poor family, was orphaned at the age of five and had to earn his own living in many different ways), represented his first attempt to bring some of his most personal concerns and preoccupations to the screen. But then he was offered the chance to make a different film, *Tangsir* (*Tangsir*, 1973), free from the usual commercial demands of the Iranian film industry of the time, and he left Kiarostami with his original project, which the latter remodelled based on his own criteria and made in Naderi's absence

with complete freedom.[33] Like *A Simple Event* (*Yek ettefagh-e sadeh*, 1973), the excellent *opera prima* by Sohrab Shahid Saless, made that same year, which is also the portrait of a harsh childhood (this time of a younger child in a village on the shores of the Caspian Sea[34]), the openly minimalist focus of *The Experience* turns the film into a new linguistic exploration, moving away from Naderi's usual forms to break new and fertile ground.

Although *The Experience* is about a love that is necessarily platonic, the passion that Mamad feels for the girl of his dreams takes on subtle but unmistakable erotic undertones in the film. He sticks blown-up photos of young female customers' faces onto the studio's publicity cardboard cut-out of a buxom mini-skirted model; this habit tells us much about the boy's sexual awakening, about his isolation and need for imaginary company to help him get through the long nights between hard-working days.[35] It is, in fact, the look that the girl gives him (mocking, but he seems not to notice) during one of their fleeting and silent encounters, that actually decides him to give up his job and present himself at her house as a prospective servant, trusting that in this way he can enjoy being close to her while perhaps improving his prospects and becoming a worthy suitor. Once again, an overpowering desire rules the fate of Kiarostami's hero. He is ready to risk the meagre livelihood on which his already precarious existence depends, for the sake of a near-impossible dream – but a dream that, after all, gives him the strength to go on and gives meaning to his life.

Throughout the whole film Mamad says no more than a few disjointed sentences; when he offers his services to the family of the girl he loves, Kiarostami moves the camera out of earshot (a fairly typical device in his later work) to prevent us from hearing the conversation. Mamad is shown as a profoundly solitary being, isolated from the community, with a severe lack of social skills aggravated by the cruel indifference and incomprehension of adults. Unlike the other young protagonists of Kiarostami's films, Mamad cannot even rely on the company or friendship of other youngsters. As Alain Bergala, a critic who has some of the best insights into Kiarostami's work, so rightly says: 'This film is practically silent

because it focuses on the character of the boy. The world around him, on the other hand, is pretty noisy; day and night, Mamad's universe is invaded by the roar of traffic'[36] and many other sounds, in contrast to his enforced solitude and introversion. Kiarostami's own favourite sequence, when Mamad is cleaning his shoes and listening to the radio before falling asleep[37] (probably in fact the most beautiful of the film), plays on just this concept of extreme isolation and on the overriding need to make a connection with the outside world. This is also why the look that Mamad exchanges with the girl takes on such an exaggerated importance to him, precipitating his rash decision.

The most outstanding part of *The Experience* is undoubtedly its final sequence – the long waiting period between Mamad's asking for a job at the house of the girl he loves and his return in the evening to be given an answer, once the girl's mother has talked the matter over with her husband. As usual, Mamad wanders the streets of Tehran with no object in mind, simply hopeful, waiting for the evening appointment that will finally make his dreams reality. But failure and disappointment lie in store. 'They say no', is the only answer he is given, through a fleetingly opened door. 'It took my entire life to reach the main street. The street was crowded … and the noise of the city ate me up …': Naderi's story finishes with these dramatic words.[38] But the cruelty of the final scene in the film is just as impressive. A zenithal shot shows Mamad, totally confused and disoriented, unable to grasp what has happened, standing stock still facing the girl's house. Seconds later he moves out of shot, and Kiarostami keeps the camera on the empty scene so long as to be uncomfortable for the audience. Here *The Experience*, as in *Bread and Alley* and *Breaktime*, has been an experience in sudden maturity, and a particularly painful one for young Mamad.

The Experience constitutes another link in the sequence of 'simple events' that seem to characterize Kiarostami's films of the 1970s.[39] *The Traveller*, his first full-length feature, made just one year later, continues in the same vein and also keeps faithfully to the familiar Kiarostami *topoi*. This time, Kiarostami based the film on a story written by a friend, Hassan Rafi. He took his film crew

to the town of Malayer, in the Hamadan province, where he filmed the adventures of another boy, Ghassem, who is also resolved to make his obsessive dream come true at all costs. Ghassem, like the protagonist of *Breaktime,* is obsessed with football, and everything else takes second place including, of course, his school work and even his family. The national team is about to play an important match in Tehran, and Ghassem decides he must see it at all costs. To do so, he will have to deceive his friends and his own mother, even steal some money to pay for the bus fare to the capital and the ticket for the match, and sneak out of the house in the middle of the night to catch the bus that will carry him to where his dreams will come true. Once again the law of desire, blind impulse, takes brutal charge over the demands of order and discipline. Although the certainty of punishment is really Ghassam's only 'baggage' when he begins his adventure …

His sense of wrongdoing is so acute that Ghassem ends up having a violent nightmare about the punishment awaiting him on his return to school. Despite this, however, the wrong is done and Ghassem (unlike his friend Akbar, also a football lover) finds himself caught up in the spiral of lies and misdeeds that will lead him to Tehran and the match. Frédéric Richard sees Akbar, who admires Ghassem's exploits but cannot bring himself to break the rules of the community to satisfy his own hopes, as an *alter ego* of Kiarostami himself.[40] But this interpretation looks contrived and is in practice undermined by the logic of the film itself. Kiarostami, who has admitted his particular interest in misdeeds as rites of passage in the construction of identity, and his sympathy for those who run such risks,[41] openly invites us to identify with Ghassem. Indeed, as Godfrey Cheshire points out: 'The most striking thing about the film is how it insinuates our desires into his designs; the worse the kid acts, the more the viewer identifies with his pursuit of a very unholy grail.'[42]

The Traveller thus constitutes, like Kiarostami's previous films, a growing-up experience for its protagonist. The film is a journey of initiation, in which after young Ghassem has overcome all obstacles in his path, the nightmare appears as his final test.[43] Now inside the

stadium, relaxing while he waits for the match to start, the boy is so tired after his night's journey that (like many other spectators), he stretches out on the grass and takes a nap; his subconscious mind then looks ahead to the severe punishment that awaits him on his return home. Ghassem is so exhausted that, in a bitterly cruel ending, he wakes from his nap to find that the match is over: the stadium is empty apart from the cleaning staff going about their work. The mission has failed, its goal unachieved; but the boy has learned many things during his adventure, and not necessarily remorse. We do not know what story Ghassem will tell his friends and classmates, but it is worth betting that he will tell them all about the match as if he had seen it, posing as a real hero who cannot disappoint his admirers. Deception – the camera with no film that he used to pretend to take their pictures – was the only means he could find to achieve his dream, and deception will finally provide him with the only logical recompense for his efforts.[44]

In fact, Ghassem's greatest adventure does not lie in running away to Tehran to see a football match but in crossing an almost insuperable barrier. 'Given that children are not allowed to do adult things, to get what he wants he has to turn himself into an adult [...] But the only way to get inside the grown-ups' world is to talk about money; whenever Ghassem tries any other approach he is simply ignored by the adults.'[45] Money is in fact the key that Ghassem, who comes from a poor family, uses in his particular journey 'through the looking-glass' to the world of the grown-ups. Kiarostami comes straight to the point about this: 'The idea of money is what drives the whole film.'[46] This would support, to a certain extent, Hormuz Kéy's socio-political reading of the film, which is virtually absent from all other analyses: 'The film should be placed once more in its historical context, because the action takes place in a poor town in 1973, during one of the harshest periods of the Shah's reign [...] The film condemns the national education system, which is shown as an obstacle to the boy's dream, to his rights to be free. Ghassem's severe beating represents a painful reality in Iran, where children and adolescents in schools and colleges are subjected to physical and psychological abuse.'[47] In his modest way, Ghassem is a genuine

rebel, someone who does not adapt to the suffocating rules of his society and refuses to admit defeat. For this reason, Kéy goes on, the use of the Amyadieh Stadium (that favoured setting for the lavish celebrations of the Shah's personality cult) for the final sequence takes on particular significance as a political allegory, while also providing the concrete setting for the boy's failure.[48]

However, leaving aside interpretations that are necessarily controversial (and which, moreover, Kiarostami himself has systematically rejected), *The Traveller* cannot either be considered merely as a neo-realist exercise with humanist overtones, as some critics have suggested.[49] Shortly after the first screening, Kiarostami was asked why he had shot the film in black and white. He pleaded budget constraints, essentially, but added: 'In any case, I think the use of black and white expresses better than colour the background of poverty and mediocrity that I was trying to show in the film.'[50] Clearly a low-budget production at a time when the Centre for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults was making its cautious start in the production of full-length features, *The Traveller* nevertheless had the novelty of being the first Iranian film shot using live sound. Kiarostami used non-actors for the whole film, all of them from the town of Malayer; his talent for this kind of film-making is already evident, and he produces a memorable performance from the young Hassan Darabi.[51] As in *The Experience*, but with greater finesse and precision, Kiarostami investigates the possibilities of the sequence shots and makes wise use of the dead times: in fact, Ghassem's night-time wait before his escape and his wanderings outside the stadium are two of the most beautiful scenes in the film.

The Traveller is still considered by diverse critics as one of Kiarostami's greatest films, and it is a favourite of the director himself.[52] Winning the Jury's Grand Prize at the 9th Tehran International Festival of Films for Children and Young Adults, the film had a limited release in specialist competitions, such as the 1975 Gijón Children's Film Festival in Spain (where it went completely unnoticed).[53] It was not enough, however, to launch its maker outside the narrow circle of Kanun and its very specific sphere

of influence. Given that, at the time, the Centre's films were still not put on commercial release and could be seen only in educational and cultural institutions, it is not surprising that Kiarostami's promising début was noticed by very few (even in Iran). One of these was the critic Jamshid Akrami; when *The Traveller* was first screened he was almost alone in praising it unreservedly. 'You might not have taken note that this popular and humble Kiarostami is presently one of the most important personalities in our young cinema.'[54] Time would prove him right, but the film-maker's immediate future held no more than the usual projects for Kanun, the most important of which was *A Suit for the Wedding*.

Kiarostami's second medium-length feature was shot two years after *The Traveller*, at the same time as he fulfilled his commitments to make 'educational' films in the strictest sense. This little-known film surprises from the outset with an abundance of dialogue, in contrast to all the director's previous fictional work. However, this should not be taken as a sign of communication. The three adolescent protagonists of *A Suit for the Wedding* (Ali, the tailor's assistant; Hossein, the sewing room apprentice; and Mamad, the waiter in the tea-room next door) have a deep mutual bond despite their occasional arguments and rivalries. Theirs, however, is a world completely alien to that of the adults, with whom they do not even attempt to communicate. The adults talk among themselves; for the youngsters, the only possible scope for communication is with each other. Fathers and brothers who hit them and bosses who never stop ordering them about people the world of the lowly young workers in *A Suit for the Wedding*. Kiarostami's vision of the child's universe had never been so desolate.

The story of *A Suit for the Wedding*, as in Kiarostami's previous films, is a simple one. Hossein and Mamad ask their friend Ali, when his employer leaves for the day, to let them try on the suit he has just finished for a wealthy client's young son to wear at his sister's wedding. The suit is therefore the object of desire that galvanizes the youngsters' spirits and leads them to commit their particular modest transgression, borrowing it for one night with the sole intention of assuming a different (fictitious) identity: the game consists simply

of finding out how 'the rich' feel in their elegant suits. *A Suit for the Wedding*, then, is daring in its treatment of poverty and the breakdown between social classes, more than any other Kiarostami film with the possible exception of *The Experience*. When Mamad, under cover of night (like Ghassem in *The Traveller*, escaping from the house in the dark), puts on the rich boy's suit and wears it to go and see a magic show, his triumph is merely the fleeting satisfaction of not being seen as a poor boy for a few hours.[55] The dream is none other than upward social mobility. But this is a vain hope, born of the secret invasion of the world 'through the looking glass' during the magic of the night. In the morning, all Mamad can expect (like Ghassem) is punishment in the form of a severe beating, while his two accomplices invent ways to return the suit to its proper place in the tailor's shop. Kiarostami is just as pessimistic here as in his previous films; but we will have to wait for *The Report* to hear his final word ...

La Règle du Jeu

We should first, however, pause briefly to look at the ten or so educational shorts (not counting *Bread and Alley* and *Breaktime*) that Kiarostami made for the Centre for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults between 1975 and 1982. Kanun's film-making department, in the hands of Ebrahim Foruzesh (also an important producer and director of children's films), became an important bastion of creativity within the narrow margins of freedom permitted to Iranian cinema at that time. The department did admittedly have to face, from very early on, persistent criticism about its precise function and, in particular, about the questionable suitability of its output for the juvenile audiences it was by definition supposed to serve.[56] While the Centre did not abandon other projects with more ambitious thematic and aesthetic aims, it undertook the production of a good number of educational films, and Kiarostami made his fair share of them.

This was definitely not in principle an ideal area for Kiarostami, nor perhaps did it interest him particularly, but he soon learned to make a virtue of necessity. He turned these short 'made to order' films into inspired explorations of the possibilities of the film-making process, which he was still trying to master.[57] According to some accounts, Kiarostami found his best sources of inspiration by leafing through the catalogue of the prestigious National Film Board of Canada, and he soon found himself immersed in the project.[58] *Toothache* (1980), one of the later films in the series, is possibly the most representative example of Kiarostami's educational cinema made for Kanun. The film, designed simply to explain to children why they must clean their teeth, is certainly the longest, the most didactic in tone and the most highly structured of all Kiarostami's shorts. The tale is in two parts, the first dealing with the young protagonist's severe toothache during his usual school activities, and then the visit to the dentist, with the latter's explanations about proper dental hygiene and the prevention of tooth decay, appropriately illustrated using effective animation techniques. Probably one of Kiarostami's least interesting films, it was apparently given an excellent reception and enjoyed quite a wide circulation.

The first of a planned series of three shorts (the others were never made), *How to Make Use of Our Leisure Time: Painting* (1977) returns to one of Kiarostami's oldest and most deeply rooted concerns and develops certain elements of the better-known (and more interesting) *Colours* (1976). It is difficult to share the enthusiasm of some critics for such a modest contribution,[59] but this invitation to young children to discover the various colours and their presence in everyday objects and surroundings gave Kiarostami the opportunity (which he had never allowed himself before) to try 'an experiment with non-narrative cinema'[60] and to explore further the possibilities afforded by the film medium. *Two Solutions for One Problem* (1975) must also be included within this body of eminently pedagogical films. It is indisputably the most moralistic and sentimental of all Kiarostami's work, in which he juxtaposes a peaceful harmonious solution with a violent quarrel between two classmates over a torn exercise book. *Two Solutions for One Problem* is thus a film with

an obvious moral. It has a certain interest, however, thanks to the unusual way in which Kiarostami tells the story; he constructs the 'lesson' as though he were demonstrating a mathematical theorem, rejecting any traditional narrative devices and, naturally, any possible emotional identification with the characters.

So Can I (1975) is considerably more interesting. Structured around two opposing scenarios, like several other films Kiarostami made for Kanun, this short film (just four minutes long) invites primary school children to look at the way animals move (using cartoon images), and then to think about those movements in comparison with their own. The children's certainty that they can imitate animal movements creates a cheerful and optimistic discourse, which is suddenly cut short when the protagonist is confronted with the sight of birds in flight. It looks as though this is another variation on the Kiarostami themes of the strength of desire and the limitations imposed by reality; but, in an unexpected twist, an aeroplane suddenly appears, circling the skies overhead. This beautiful ending to *So Can I*, with the boy 'caught between the impossibility of copying the birds and the solution provided by technology', in Tullio Masoni's words, exudes an undeniable lyricism; it resists any narrow interpretation involving a predictable and simplistic 'moral' to the story. In addition, 'the distance between the impossible dream and the modern "miracle" is apparently viewed by the director with a mixture of enlightened confidence and a feeling of surprise', which only serves to enhance the subtle charm that permeates *So Can I*.[61]

Orderly or Disorderly? (1981) is one of the most famous and controversial of Kiarostami's short features. This is probably due to the basic ambiguity of its construction and to the fact that it expresses Kiarostami's first concrete reflections on the mechanics of film-making. As Jean-Marc Lalanne says, 'this little short, supposedly in praise of the rule of order, is probably the most irreverent and the most amusing of Kiarostami's educational films made for Kanun. The starting point is as clearly educational as could be: to show in succession how to behave and how not to behave in public places. Order versus disorder, the use of reason versus

brute passion, a strongly organised society versus the absurdity of individual initiative and anarchy. This simple play of opposites, order/disorder, unfolded through various scenes of everyday life, is the keystone of an ideology to which the film lends something of the quality of a doctrine. Rarely has any Kiarostami film looked so much like a mathematical equation or a scientific experiment. It is about demonstrating a law, and in order to do this the experiment must be repeated many times and all the results must be analyzed. Clearly, a structure like this could produce a mechanical and barren film. None of the characters brings a touch of humanity to the process, and there is not even a germ of a narrative that could arouse any emotion. The only order is that of a discourse intended to prove the initial theory. But then Kiarostami has the idea of subverting the system, by imagining that the shooting of the film is progressively disturbed by the very disorder that it is talking about ...'[62]

Thus, after more than ten minutes of conscientiously demonstrating the benefits of orderliness in community life (once more exemplified in the 'microcosm' of school) – represented by the time-code in the inspired sequence where the children get on the school bus – *Orderly or Disorderly?* adopts a self-referential and parodic tone, which nothing could have led us to expect ... apart perhaps from the question mark in the title (which no filmography of Kiarostami has seemingly troubled to include). Kiarostami explodes from within the binary structure he had used in *Two Solutions for One Problem*. To do this he uses a device hitherto unheard of in his films: the appearance – or rather intrusion – of the film-making process, in the shape of the soundtrack. The film crew cannot manage to shoot the scenes as planned, and their comments (as voiceover) reflect their impatience and desperation at the unsatisfactory results. The last straw for the exasperated crew is the final scene, intended to show how urban traffic flows more smoothly when traffic regulations are followed. Every single attempt to film ends in chaos. The impossibility of filming in an 'orderly' way triumphs in the end. We hear Kiarostami say to his cameraman, 'We'll have to ask that traffic policeman for a bit of order here ... Cut! Cut! ... Can we manage to get at least one "orderly" take? ... Right, we'll have a

"disorderly" one, then ... "Disorderly", all right ... Go and ask where we can film with a bit of "order".' The response comes back swiftly: 'Nowhere.' The traffic gets more chaotic and over the sound of car horns we hear Kiarostami say resignedly, 'All right, cut!' The film is over.

Orderly or Disorderly? is tinged with a distinct sense of irony, and is undeniably playful. This is perhaps why it has been exaggeratedly seen by some critics as 'one of the most subversive short films by Kiarostami',[63] in its confirmation of the perpetual challenge that disorder represents to the best-laid plans: an idea that is just the opposite to the supposed 'moral' of the film ... But, on the other hand, it would be wrong to think of the film simply as a joke or bright idea on Kiarostami's part, because this same theme will be used as the framework of some of his later films; Oksana Bulgakowa has even spoken of a 'struggle against chaos trilogy', the other two being *Fellow Citizen* (1983) and *First Graders* (1985).[64] More than any other of Kiarostami's shorts made for Kanun, *Orderly or Disorderly?* invites us to downplay the importance of their supposed educational purpose. Rather than a lesson, this film in particular is certainly a reflection on order,[65] considerably more subtle and complex than its potential audience of children could appreciate. But the doubts about the real nature of Kiarostami's contribution to educational cinema at the behest of the Centre for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults do not end here.

Kiarostami himself has always claimed, from the early days of his career, that he was never a specialist in children's cinema. 'I don't consider myself in any way as a director who makes films for children. I've only shot one film for children; all the rest are about children.'[66] Although probably an overstatement, Kiarostami's assertion should nevertheless be taken very seriously when considering his contribution to Kanun's film production. While it is true that this programme undoubtedly restricted the film-maker on many occasions to films about educational issues, it is equally true that he almost always avoided the easy assignments and predictable lessons by one means or another. In this sense, 'his films are very different from the kind of didactic cinema found in

"documentary films"', becoming instead complex invitations to start 'an education in looking at the world'.[67] As Carlos F. Heredero rightly points out – while taking later features such as *First Graders* or *Homework* equally into consideration – Kiarostami's educational films stem from 'an express willingness to ask questions and elicit replies, as a means to investigate, or call into question, the falsely one-dimensional dogmatism about reality'; or, in other words, 'from a society paralysed by the rigid hierarchy of its roles'.[68] Kiarostami thus understands the pedagogical task to consist of a journey of initiation, of uncertain destination but inexorable completion. His young protagonists are constantly faced with dilemmas and alternatives, which require them to take decisions alone, to weigh up possibilities, to choose and move forward; in short, to act as free agents.[69] Life as a series of choices is a theme that reverberates strongly throughout Kiarostami's work.

The (quasi-) obligation of the Kanun film-makers to deal with themes related to childhood problems did, however, have its compensations in the form of the relative creative freedom they enjoyed, at least in comparison with the demands and restrictions suffered by the Iranian film industry in the last years of the Shah's reign. Indeed, 'film-makers who worked at the Centre faced no financial restraints or problems, and thus could easily engage in experimentation with audacity, vigor, and intellectual innovations'.[70] Unconcerned by any commercial considerations (at that time not even the full-length features produced by Kanun were shown on the normal cinema network), Kiarostami and his colleagues could afford to be whimsical and even eccentric in a way that would be unimaginable without the protective mantle of the Centre. There is no need to refer to the magnificent series of animations or any of the other daring experiments carried out during those years. Kiarostami's own work offers an excellent example: *Solution No. 1* (1978).

The film, one of the first that Kiarostami shot in 16mm, was also his first experience of making a film for Kanun that was not about the world of childhood. The story of a young man who tries to hitch a lift back to his broken-down car, carrying a patched-up

tyre, has no apparent connection with the director's previous work. Losing all hope of being picked up, the youngster decides to walk to his car, left in a remote mountain spot. Suddenly, the wheel takes on a life of its own and rolls magically towards its destination; the young man no longer has to push it along, but has to take care not to be left behind. The journey, real or imaginary, seems to restore confidence to the driver, a genuine Kiarostami-type hero alone in the face of difficult circumstances and obstacles which he struggles obstinately to overcome. The unexpected turn of events, which culminates in a radiantly happy ending, constitutes an outburst of cheerfulness and renewed hope in mankind's abilities and potential. The moral is potentially clear; thus, for Marco Della Nave, '[in *Solution No. 1*] it all comes down to a joyful invitation to face up to the trials of daily life, because even the strangest events can turn out to be times of adventure and fantasy, giving us never-to-be-repeated opportunities to escape the tyranny of necessity'.[71] For other critics, the film's infectious vitality suggests a certain redemption of the character and even a discovery of the meaning of life, thanks to the magical adventure set in train by the extraordinary behaviour of an object – the wheel that comes to life – given here an undeniable symbolic meaning;[72] or it could be a timely emphasis on the moral of effort justly rewarded.[73]

However, another interpretation is possible. The distinguished Iranian critic Houshang Golmakani – for whom *Solution No. 1* is a 'bitter, black, and disappointing film' – highlights some elements that seem to be irreconcilable with the interpretations offered by the majority of Western critics: 'From the sociological perspective, the film recounts the collapse of social bonds and ties among members of the society. From the philosophical outlook, it evinces man's loneliness. For the first time ever, Kiarostami, in this film, uses one and only one character in the whole film [...] Kiarostami's standpoint and his bitter thoughts are reminiscent of the familiar intellectual atmosphere of those years'.[74] We shall explore these suggestions in the next section. For the moment it will suffice to emphasize again the enormous freedom Kiarostami enjoyed in pursuing his personal projects while still within the (potentially)

restrictive setting of the Centre for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults. Like so many other Kiarostami films of that period, *Solution No. 1* has no dialogue and prefers to experiment with the interaction between images and music, as did *Bread and Alley* in a not dissimilar way. But the peculiar features of the story and its deliberate distancing from any kind of realism make it more closely related to the tradition of slapstick or, better still, to the spirit of the best films of Norman McLaren and his disciples at the National Film Board of Canada.

In quite a different way, *The Chorus* (1982), a later film (in fact, the last short made for Kanun), is further evidence of the high degree of creative freedom and the growing desire to experiment that Kiarostami would ultimately bring to his educational films. Shot in Rasht, the capital of the Gilan region where Kiarostami's family came from and to which he would soon return to shoot *Where is the Friend's House?*, this little jewel among Kiarostami's films uses many elements of his previous films. In particular, the old man with the hearing aid who couldn't hear the protagonist's cries for help in *Bread and Alley* reappears here at the centre of the action. Feeling tired and oppressed by the noises from the street, he finally turns off his hearing aid and so cannot hear his granddaughters knocking on the door when they return from school, causing an impromptu gathering of children outside his window. With its subjective use of sound as the determining diegetic element, *The Chorus* above all 'should be considered essentially as a reflection on the effect of the sound component within the language of film'.[75] A direct continuation of the attempt made just a few months before at the end of *Orderly or Disorderly?*, it is the first experiment of this kind, which will later be identified as one of the constant features of Kiarostami's work.

'I regard sound as being very important, more essential than pictures,' says Kiarostami. 'A two-dimensional flat image is all you can achieve with your camera, whatever you may do. It's the sound that gives depth as the third dimension to that image. Sound, in fact, makes up for this shortcoming of pictures. Compare architecture and painting. The former deals with space while all you have in painting

is surface.'[76] The film's reflections on solitude and isolation, as well as its evidence of a profound generation gap, are articulated precisely with this masterly use of sound. This, together with a subtle sense of humour, combines to make the film one of the key elements of Kiarostami's evolution as a film-maker within the Centre for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults. Here, he would very soon start making just full-length features, of greater substance and ambition – starting with *First Graders* (1985).

Two other shorts, which for a long time were virtually impossible to see for various censorship reasons, complete Kiarostami's educational films for Kanun. The first of these, *Tribute to the Teacher* (1977), was intended to be a simple homage to all teachers, to be shown in the presence of the Shah on Teachers' Day. The film was commissioned from Kanun personally by the Education Minister himself, Manuchehr Ganji, who in the end demanded that Kiarostami make several cuts. It seems that the director flatly refused, instead inviting the minister himself to make whatever cuts he deemed appropriate. Ganji indignantly replied that he was a minister, not a film censor; as a result of the confrontation, the film was never screened. Curiously, the images that Ganji wanted to suppress were of women (presumably opposed to the Shah's philosophy of an excessive spirit of modernization) wearing the *hijab*; after the Revolution, it was the images of women *without* veils that would once more make the film impossible to show ...[77]

A similar fate awaited *Case No. 1, Case No. 2* (1979), a short feature clearly within the category of Kiarostami's educational films for Kanun, the title of which moreover signals another variation on the play with alternatives that had already proved so popular with the director. A teacher sends a group of pupils out of the classroom for talking while his back was turned: as the guilty party does not own up, all the back row pupils must leave the room. Kiarostami then shows the film of these events to various personages in educational circles, and records their opinions. This was the simple idea of the film, which circumstances would nevertheless contrive to make one of the most problematic and controversial of the director's career. On 16th January 1979, when shooting was nearly over, the Shah

fled the country following the escalation of tension and widespread protests by vast sections of the Iranian population. On 1st February, Ayatollah Khomeini arrived in Tehran from his place of exile in France, and ten days later the Islamic Republic was declared. The film material was now unusable, as well as entirely inappropriate from the political point of view; there was no value or interest in the opinions of the Shah's educational experts.

Kiarostami then remade the film in two ways. First, he managed to obtain the opinions of several members of the new regime to replace the interviews already recorded (material which has apparently disappeared forever). Second, he introduced a more complex structure to the film, presenting 'case number two'– one of the pupils names the guilty party and is allowed to return to the classroom – with the corresponding commentary by the same interviewees. In the midst of the whirlwind of revolution, it is not surprising that all of Kiarostami's witnesses sympathize with the young victims of reprisal; some even make explicit comparisons between the punitive school system and the Shah's repressive regime, or between the attitude of the tale-telling pupil and the policy of informing promoted by the Shah's secret police, the fearsome SAVAK. *Case No. 1, Case No. 2*, based as it was on a trivial school episode and in the context of new political circumstances, thus became a rich and complex document of the profound tensions at the heart of Iranian society in the first days of the Islamic Revolution. With their emotions still galvanized by the dizzy speed of events, dazzled by the fire of revolutionary fervour, the interviewees talk enthusiastically about freedom, tolerance, humanist education, civic duties, human rights ... a discourse that would soon prove to be inappropriate.

Case No. 1, Case No. 2 is a wonderful snapshot of the first tide of revolution, not only because of the time it was made but also, even more importantly, because of the wide range of personalities assembled by Kiarostami in front of the camera to judge his naughty schoolchildren. Thus the new Education and Foreign Ministers appear alongside Nureddin Kianuri, General Secretary of the Tudeh (the Communist Party, soon to be banned); the spokesmen for the

Jabha-ye Milli (National Front, a democratic party also soon to be declared illegal) and for the Human Rights Defence Association; the Archbishop Artok Manukian, head of the Iranian Armenian Church; a representative from the country's large Jewish community; the woman director of state television and a woman educational expert (neither wearing the *hijab*, which was not yet compulsory); and, significantly, a representative of the Muslim clergy, the *sheikh* Sadegh Khalkhali, soon to be sadly notorious for his zeal in the implacable persecution of political dissidents, securing the death penalty for hundreds of them. Kiarostami keeps his distance from his interviewees and the subject, leaving them to speak for themselves, but inevitably the film bears admirable witness to that 'Thermidor in Iran' about which so much has been written[78] but of which there is very little film evidence, however, apart from a few pieces of documentary footage.[79] *Case No. 1, Case No. 2* was immediately awarded a prize at the Tehran Festival of Films for Children and Young Adults; shortly afterwards, the government banned its release, and it remained in total obscurity until the large retrospective of Kiarostami's work held in Turin in the autumn of 2003.

The Eclipse

Kiarostami dedicated himself entirely to his work for the Centre for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, until he left in 1992 after making *Life and Nothing More ...* There are, however, two exceptions. The first is an atypical short feature, *Jahan-Nama Palace,* long thought to have been lost. It seems that the film was commissioned by Mariette Ghiai, the wife of the Shah's famous architect Heydar Ghiai, to document the restoration of one of the royal palaces, a project that Kiarostami's father worked on. Filming began in the spring of 1974, and was halted three years later, in March 1977, while the restoration work was still continuing. The film was never shown before the Revolution,

and Mariette Ghiai took the negative with her when she went into exile in France; she authorized its screening for the first time at the Nantes Film Festival in 1996. Although Olivier Joyard, who saw it on that occasion, wrote a very enthusiastic review in his column for *Cahiers du Cinéma*,[80] Kiarostami does not apparently attach much importance to the film, and its fortunate recovery does not in fact add anything significant to our evaluation of the director's work during this period.

The Report, Kiarostami's second full-length feature and the most rigidly censored of all his films after the outbreak of the Islamic Revolution, is for many reasons a complete *rara avis* among his films – in the first place, obviously, because it was made outside Kanun and was intended for commercial release. Kiarostami certainly enjoyed a comfortable position at the Centre, unconcerned by any financial constraints, permitted a certain licence to experiment and to a certain extent protected from the harsh censorship of the Shah's regime. It is true that the Centre for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults was often the subject of criticism in its character of a state institution as such, supposedly respectful of the regime and rarely inclined to social comment or political opposition; although films like *The Experience* and *The Traveller*, not to mention others such as Nasser Taghvai's short *Liberation* (*Rahai*, 1972) and Amir Naderi's *Harmonica* (*Sazdahani*,1974), could hardly be called conformist.[81] Kiarostami's relative independence also necessarily resulted, however, in a feeling of isolation,[82] and it is therefore quite understandable that the director should wish to venture finally into the stormy waters of the Iranian New Wave cinema. *The Report* would be made with the help of his friend Bahman Farmanara, the film's producer and himself one of the most active exponents of the movement.[83]

The origins of *Sinema-ye motefavet* (literally, 'alternative or different cinema'), or New Iranian Cinema, date back to 1969, when Dariush Mehrjui – a young journalist trained in the United States – made his second full-length feature, *The Cow* (*Gav*), which immediately became the flagship of the movement for renewal of the stagnant Iranian cinema. Based on a story by the great writer

Gholam Hossein Saedi, also clearly aligned with progressive politics, the film was banned by the government on the grounds of its strong element of social comment; this despite the fact that it was produced by the Ministry of Art and Culture. Mehrjui succeeded in smuggling a copy out of the country and showing it at the Venice Film Festival in 1971, where it was awarded the Critics' Grand Prize. This success led to the lifting of the ban, two years retrospectively, albeit at the cost of adding a credit situating the action in the past (thereby avoiding any possible perceived reference to the present Shah's government). Exactly the same fate befell Nasser Taghvai's first film, *Tranquillity in the Presence of Others* (*Aramesh dar hozur-e digaran*, 1971), an incisive condemnation of the corruption rife in Iranian society, which was not screened until two years after it was made, thus reinforcing a practice that was lamentably common in the last years of the Shah's reign.

Despite the above, the production of a string of very interesting films by young directors in the early 1970s soon justified the term 'New Iranian Cinema'. The first Tehran Film Festival in 1972 would prove to be the very platform for this movement, which was shaped in the space of a few years by films such as *Downpour* (*Ragbar*, 1972) and *The Stranger and the Fog* (*Gharibeh va meh*, 1974) by Bahram Beyzai, or the previously mentioned *Tangsir* (*Tangsir*, 1973) by Amir Naderi, *The Mongols* (*Mogholha*, 1973) by Parviz Kimiavi, and *A Simple Event* (*Yek ettefagh-e sadeh*, 1973) by Sohrab Shahid Saless. Several of these were produced by state agencies, as in the case of *The Mongols*, a savage indictment of the devastating effects of the arrival of television (produced appropriately enough by Iranian state television). However, some of the New Wave film-makers preferred to set up their own production company in the form of a cooperative, called, significantly, 'Centre for New Cinema', or, perhaps more literally, 'Centre for Avant-Garde Film-Makers' (Kanun-e sinemagaran-e pishro). The first films produced by this collective were Shahid Saless's magnificent *Still Life* (*Tabiat-e bijan*, 1974) and Mehrjui's controversial *Mina's Cycle* (*Dayereh-ye Mina*, 1975), which offended the Shah's sensibilities and remained banned until 1978. The very active cooperative filming in Super-8,

called 'Free Cinema' (*Sinema-ye azad*), also founded in the critical year of 1969, supported these initiatives on a more modest scale, nevertheless exercising a salutary effect on the Iranian cinema scene during the first half of the 1970s.

In the adverse political conditions of the time, and subject to strict control by the censors, the New Iranian Cinema necessarily became somewhat impenetrable, almost cryptic; this, combined with the influence of directors like Godard and Bresson, eventually made it clearly a minority cinema, out of touch with public taste. Popular cinema continued to follow a very different trend during a favourable period for the economy, in which annual production topped 100 films and about 120 production companies were set up (but of these only 20 or so were regular producers). The number of cinemas also underwent an extraordinary increase: 237 cinemas in 1960 rose to 438 in 1975 and, more importantly, cinemas became more widely spread throughout the country – the number of towns with a cinema practically doubled. The rising inflation of the mid-1970s threatened production, however, which shrank alarmingly from 1977 onwards (38 films were premiered that year, only 15 in 1978); and the films themselves became progressively less interesting. Even the initial momentum of the New Wave seemed to peter out. *Requiem* (*Marsiyeh*, 1976), perhaps Naderi's most pessimistic film, *Sealed Land* (*Khak-e beghr*, 1977) by Marva Nabili and the enigmatic *The Ballad of Tara* (*Cherikeh Tara*, 1978) by Beyzai are among the few important contributions in the second half of the 1970s, but they were all banned. In an increasingly turbulent political environment, critics began to talk about the 'death of Iranian cinema'.

The Shah's government, which was prepared to continue promoting cinema-going as the main form of popular entertainment (and unwilling to waste its potential as a powerful instrument of propaganda), had long resisted pressure from the Motion Pictures Export Association for a substantial increase in seat prices (up to 400%, according to some proposals). Faced with the boycott of the US majors in 1975, Iran began to import on a massive scale spaghetti Westerns and martial arts films from Hong Kong, which

were much cheaper than US productions. Although the latter would soon return to Iranian screens (when the government gave way and authorized a modest increase in seat prices), these minor genres became extraordinarily popular; Bruce Lee, in particular, beat all box-office records at the time. With the New Wave suppressed for political reasons and the predominance of commercial films that were coarse and complacent (according to a calculation by the newspaper *Kayhan* in February 1978, more than half the cinemas in Tehran were then showing films defined as erotic), it is not surprising that the cinema – still protected by the Shah, as evidenced by the policy of co-productions – became one of the favourite targets of the anti-government activist groups. The tragically famous torching of Cinema Rex in Abadan in August 1978 has to be seen in this context.[84]

Kiarostami made his début in commercial cinema, therefore, at a time of great creative effervescence, severe economic crisis and high political tension. *The Report* reflects all these factors in one way or another, and the director himself openly recognizes this: 'I called it *The Report* because I wanted to make a kind of chronicle of life in Tehran in the years before the Revolution, about the extraordinary pressures people felt, their financial problems, the black job market.'[85] We see a close-up of the credits being typed out on a piece of paper, anticipating the coldness of Kiarostami's stance throughout the film, entirely removed from any concession to drama, even less to moralizing. Under his surgical knife, this harrowing report is in the first instance the portrait of a marital crisis; it is not hard to see the parallels with the difficulties that the director's own marriage was going through at the time, which would soon culminate in separation. Even if his own films made during these years did not clearly show it, Kiarostami has on occasion owned that he was extremely unhappy at this time, his profound pessimism only partly overcome with the passing of the years.[86] Apart from insignificant details, Firuzkui, the afflicted tax inspector in *The Report*, is very like Kiarostami himself, and their trials are also similar. Godfrey Cheshire, who has talked to the director personally on several occasions, even speaks of a critical

self-portrait: 'The callow, shifty husband in *The Report* – with his expensive aviator glasses and foppish '70s moustache accentuating a weak chin – is a self-portrait etched in acid, a lacerating description of personal weakness casually destroying a fragile network of work and family ties.'[87]

The Report covers four days in the life of a middle-class couple in Iran at the end of the 1970s, four decisive days, which Kiarostami nevertheless presents with no particular emphasis. At the same time that the protagonist (a civil servant in the Ministry of Finance) is accused of corruption, his relationship with his wife, Azam, deteriorates to the point of violence, which leads her to try to commit suicide.[88] The couple's problems are seen to be insoluble from the beginning, for all that they share a home (they can only just afford to pay the rent on their apartment), take turns looking after their little daughter (a constant source of argument) and make several attempts at reconciliation, which only end by plunging them deeper into the abyss of mutual incomprehension. Kiarostami's only bedroom scene to date is thus as chaste as it is chilling: 'To film the relationship between these two people,' explains the director, 'I had to film their bodies, show that they could talk about anything except love and that making love had become a real tragedy for both of them.'[89] The only other physical contact between the couple is, significantly, the savage beating that Firuzkui gives his wife, a scene that still today scandalizes the Islamic Republic authorities; in their eyes, it undoubtedly justifies – more than any of the numerous other possible objections – the film's continued systematic banning and seizure within Iran.

It would, however, be highly simplistic to consider *The Report* merely as a disturbing account of a troubled marriage. Kiarostami also directly tackles the issue of corruption, a fashionable theme in Iranian cinema at the time, not that this made it an easy topic or any less likely to be censored, as was clearly demonstrated by the banning (mentioned above) of *Tranquillity in the Presence of Others*, Nasser Taghvai's timely exploration of this theme. But in reality, and despite the importance of this element in *The Report*, it is only one piece of the great Kiarostami mosaic. The director is not

so much interested in condemning corruption as in revealing and deconstructing the mechanisms that support it, in showing a closely woven web of shallow and vacuous relationships, with no civic or personal future, like the couple's own relationship. *The Report* is without any doubt a film without hope,[90] a film which shows 'the hell of existence in all its everyday banality',[91] to use Youssef Ishaghpour's elegant and accurate expression.

In this sense, it is impossible to ignore the circumstances in which *The Report* was filmed. These include not only Kiarostami's previously mentioned personal problems, but also the renewed flare-up of tensions in Iranian society, repression by SAVAK and the intensified activity of the Shah's political opponents following his creation of a new political party, Rastakhiz (Hezb-e Rastakhiz-e Iran, or Resurgence Party of Iran), declared without scruple as the only legal political party. The letter sent to the ruler in June 1977 by Karim Sanjabi, Shahpur Bakhtiar and Dariush Foruhar, all well-known and respected opposition figures, at the time important leaders of the democratic National Front, could not be more eloquent: 'Since 1953 [the year of the coup d'état that ousted Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh] Iran has lived in an atmosphere of fear and terror. All forms of opposition are brutally crushed almost before they begin; but, if they do materialize, they are drowned in a bloodbath. The memory of those days when people could talk openly, when books were sold with no restriction, when, in Mossadegh's time, demonstrations were legal, has become with the passing of the years an ever more distant dream, already blurred in our minds. Every activity, however insignificant, is banned from the moment that the Court looks unfavourably on it. The people are condemned to silence; they are not permitted to speak, nor to express their opinions, nor to make any protest. Only one path remains: that of clandestine struggle.'[92] Many professional and human rights associations were set up in quick succession to help in the reorganization of the different political opposition groups. The Iranian Writers' Association (Kanun-e Nevisandegan), the epicentre of political resistance in cultural circles, whose activities had been declared illegal in 1971, also reappeared in 1977 to organize in

October the famous Ten Nights of Poetry, which became a huge gathering of democratic sections of Iranian society.[93]

The *occidentosis* condemned by Jalal Al-e Ahmad, one of the leading lights of the Iranian Writers' Association, in a well-known and controversial book published long before (in 1962), continued to be the subject of heated debates, symposiums and conferences; it even had its ironic echoes in the films and poetry of the time.[94] The extreme modernization programme undertaken by the Shah, far from being confined to the millions invested in military technology, had had a devastating effect on the social fabric of the country, causing deep discontent. The demoralization of the whole country can be clearly perceived in *The Report*, where we find no less than 'a society sinking inexorably into ruin', in exactly the same way as the Firuzkuis' marriage; its emotional and sexual breakdown provides a perfect illustration'.[95] In the film there is no hope for the future. Dense and sombre, it ends with a disturbing sequence, bathed in a quasi-spectral light, in which a stunned Firuzkui leaves the hospital at dawn after learning of his wife's failed suicide attempt. Nothing will change.

Since its exceptional revival at the Locarno Film Festival in 1995, many critics have stressed the extremely sober format of *The Report*; the camera hardly moves, but the director makes effective use of unusual camera positions to create 'unnatural' frames, which give more emphasis to the protagonists' feelings of oppression.[96] As Ishaghpour says, 'despite its melodramatic content, with its crescendo of personal catastrophes, *The Report* maintains a tone of objective description, an asceticism (there is nothing comparable in the exaggerated Iranian commercial cinema, but neither is there in the rhetorical tradition of a country that has never cultivated prose or realism), a coldness and aridity in the construction; there is a kind of geometric – graphic – discipline in the framings, in the precision of the editing, the acting, the dialogue and the very way of telling the story. Without these elements, it would be difficult to stand watching such an accumulation of problems, or their tedious banality'.[97] The controversial wife-beating sequence exemplifies, better than any other, the increasing refinement of Kiarostami's style

and his first experiments with formulas that would later become habitual and would even be recognized as the 'hallmarks' of the director. The argument starts when Azam is packing her bags to leave, and Firuzkui stands in the doorway to block her path. After a violent struggle, Azam runs to lock herself in her room. He follows her and, once inside the room, begins to beat her; the audience can hardly see anything through the half-open door. We can only hear her screams and, in an expressive sound close-up, the crying – wounding, unbearable – of little Behnush, who, like us, stays outside in the sitting room.[98]

Despite being a difficult film, which might suggest the great films by Antonioni or Bergman, were it not for the fact that Kiarostami had presumably never seen any, but which certainly owes a debt to the strict minimalism of Sohrab Shahid Saless, *The Report* was well-received at its first public screening in June 1978; it might have ensured a fertile career for its director in the *Sinema-ye motefavet* if the latter had not been virtually dismantled – at least for a few years – by the turbulent events of the Islamic Revolution. Some of the most distinguished members of the movement did hail it as an important film, and the influential critic Farrokh Ghaffari praised it without reserve: 'This film is real. Reality plus art, adding up to a masterpiece.'[99] However, the film soon disappeared from circulation, swelling the ranks of films *sine die* in limbo, banned by the new regime. It is perfectly legitimate to wonder, as Ishaghpour does, how Kiarostami's cinema might have developed if such very exceptional circumstances had not intervened.[100] Conjecture aside, the simple truth is that the director returned to the protective environment of Kanun, and there, once again adopting the obligatory and familiar formula of films about childhood, he would continue with his personal career.

CHAPTER TWO

The School We Went To

For years now
I have been suspended
between the seasons
like a scrap of straw.
Abbas Kiarostami

Stories of the Revolution

The Revolution caught Kiarostami, as we have seen, in the middle of shooting *Case No. 1, Case No. 2*, and he was obliged to rethink the film to a great extent. *Toothache, Orderly or Disorderly?* and *The Chorus*, his next shorts, took him back onto safer ground, during the very years when the political upheavals that followed the Revolution in February 1979 had virtually paralyzed the Iranian film industry. It has been repeated *ad nauseam* that the revolt against the Shah, which would lead (somewhat unexpectedly) to his downfall and the establishment of the Islamic Republic,

was genuinely populist and classless. As an enthusiastic Michel Foucault declared, while the excitement of the events was still at its height, 'among the things which characterize this revolution is the fact that it shows – and few peoples in history have been able to achieve this – a completely collective will'.[1] Conscious of the singularity of this phenomenon and of the fact that it did not easily fit the political mentality of the period, Foucault rehabilitated the part played by religion in the Iranian Revolution as 'the spirit of a spiritless world', arguing with remarkable insight that religion 'truly constituted the vocabulary, the ritual, the timeless drama which could encompass the historical drama played out by a people weighing up the value of their lives against that of their sovereign'.[2]

In various ways and with various nuances, most experts describe their understanding of the Islamic Revolution as an event based not so much on economic factors or class interests as on the severe crisis of legitimacy of the Iranian state under the despotic rule of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, and the profound sense of cultural alienation experienced by people from all areas and levels of society.[3] The intensification of protest demonstrations in 1977 and 1978 did not signify anything radically new in Iranian political life, but the return of the respected *ayatollah* Khomeini from exile in France acted as a powerful catalyst, which, as is well known, forced the Shah into his precipitate flight. Coming almost as a surprise after so many years of dictatorship and an unending series of episodes of blind repression throughout an interminable quarter-century, the Islamic Revolution finally took place at a moment when political opposition was extraordinarily fragmented. Both the National Front and the Tudeh (Communist Party), not to mention the *mojahedin*, the *fedaiyan* or other extreme left-wing splinter groups, accepted that the unifying force of Shi'ism and the leadership of Khomeini (not for nothing called 'the red *mullah*' by distinguished Marxist leaders[4]) was in accordance with their interests. This was the one and only path of the Revolution. Events gathered tremendous speed, however, between 1979 and 1982, when repression and ideological polarization reached their height. The occupation of the United States embassy in Tehran

between November 1979 and January 1981 and the breakout of war with Iraq following Saddam Hussein's invasion in September 1980 were skilfully manipulated by Khomeini to bring together certain factions of society under the rule of the *velayat-e faqih* (supremacy of the religious judge or, by extension, government by men of religion), and to get rid of others by imprisonment, execution or exile. The removal of President Banisadr in June 1981 was thus followed by constant harassment of the main opposition groups, soon almost entirely disbanded – with at least 1,800 executions in just four months, according to Amnesty International sources[5] – and the appointment in October of the *hojjatoleslam* Ali Khamenei as the new president of the Republic, replacing Mohammad Ali Rajai who had been assassinated. With all the liberal opposition and Marxist groups entirely 'purged' (the Tudeh was finally dissolved in May 1982), along with the more open-minded of the clergy, the Khomeini faction finally carried the day. The 'revolution within a revolution' was over.

In cultural circles, the tension between the different factions of the regime could not but be strongly felt: 'although every faction declared its commitment to Islamic cultural ideals, all consensus vanished when it came to the question of what these ideals were and which policies were required to achieve them. Still, cultural directions had to be set, and compromises had to be made'.[6] In the film world, the initial dislike for the medium among the more conservative factions began to moderate, thanks to the early and positive reappraisal of it by Ayatollah Khomeini himself. Often badly quoted, the words of his famous speech on 2nd February 1979 in Behest-e Zahra, Tehran's main cemetery, hardly leave much room for doubt: 'Why was it necessary to make the cinema a centre of vice? We are not opposed to the cinema, to radio or to television; what we oppose is vice and the use of the media to keep our young people in a state of backwardness and dissipate their energies. We have never opposed these features of modernity in themselves, but when they were brought from Europe to the East, particularly to Iran, unfortunately they were used not in order to advance civilization, but in order to drag us into barbarism. The cinema is a modern invention that ought to be used for the sake

of educating the people, but, as you know, it was used instead to corrupt our youth. It is this misuse of the cinema that we are opposed to, a misuse caused by the treacherous policies of our rulers.'[7]

However, the confusion then reigning in cultural circles and the unstoppable recession in the film industry immediately following the Revolution could not be resolved by a simple stroke of the pen. Iranian film production remained virtually paralyzed until 1983, while those cinemas that had survived the frequent attacks (their names now changed on the pretext of recent events and the nationalization of those with foreign ownership) showed during those years such classics of political cinema as *The Battle of Algiers* (*La battaglia di Algeri*, Gillo Pontecorvo, 1966) and *Z* (*Z*, Costa-Gavras, 1972), banned in their time by the Shah's regime. The greatest proportion of the films shown – about one-third – was of Soviet origin, followed by Italian and US productions. Despite what may be thought, the latter never disappeared from Iranian screens (not even during the hostage crisis). In their battle against cinematic vulgarity, the Iranian authorities drastically reduced imports of B-grade Turkish, Indian and Japanese films, but in general they confined themselves to vigilant scrutiny based much more on ideological guidelines than on the origin of the films. In the end, the films that suffered most from the change of direction were Iranian productions themselves, made during the previous few years, doomed to invisibility in the framework of the new era that followed the Islamic Revolution.[8]

Iranian film production was characterized mainly by opportunism and confusion during the first few years of the post-revolutionary period. In reality, a large number of films released between 1979 and 1982 had been made before the Revolution, and they were simply 'touched up' to make them acceptable in the new circumstances.[9] The Revolution and the struggle against the Shah and his secret police, the SAVAK, immediately became the favourite theme of Iranian producers, basically because this allowed them to make action films in which they could reproduce the formulas of commercial cinema before the Revolution, simply dressed up with the appropriate slogans. Dissatisfied with the results, the authorities blocked the release of 40% of the films made between 1979 and

the beginning of 1983. The withdrawal of work permits from many cinema industry professionals and the strict surveillance over some of the directors of the 'old guard' who were still active did not help at all to create the sought-after 'quality' cinema based on Islamic principles and values. The confusion over guidelines and criteria, as well as the constant turnover among functionaries responsible for cinematic policy, were quite frankly unlikely to contribute during these early years to achieving this ambition; on the contrary, they created within the sector 'a trial-and-error mentality', which could only be unproductive in every sense.[10]

The need for proper and effective regulation of the Iranian film sector started to make itself strongly felt, then, after several years of disorder. The turning point came in 1982 with the appointment of Mohammad Khatami as Minister of Culture and Islamic Orientation, after which various measures were adopted to this end. The nature and scope of these varied considerably, but they all reflected the intention of bringing about a renewal in Iranian cinema and ensuring a loyal audience in the domestic market. One of the first measures to be adopted (in May 1983) was the banning of commercial distribution of videocassettes, with the consequent closure of all video clubs throughout the country. In the years following the 1979 Revolution, the video market (above all, the flourishing black market in foreign videos) had grown to considerable proportions, owing to the dubious attractions of the cinema offerings, mediocre television and the absence of other forms of entertainment (even pop music had been banned). The authorities promptly decided that this activity constituted one of the main obstacles to the recovery of the Iranian film industry, and they proceeded to act accordingly. Naturally, partial measures such as these were not sufficient in themselves to generate a recovery, and so the Farabi Cinema Foundation was created – an organization reporting to the Deputy Minister for Film Affairs at the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance – to oversee the numerous planned reforms.

In line with their concern for the recovery of the internal market, the Iranian authorities then put a stop to the more or less indiscriminate importation of foreign films, granting rigorous control of the latter

to the Farabi Cinema Foundation, with effect from February 1984. Films by European or Japanese directors (Tarkovski, Kurosawa, etc.) would now be the only alternatives to recent local productions, given that the release of old pre-Revolution films was also restricted so severely that they almost disappeared entirely. In a parallel move, the government reduced municipal taxes on showing Iranian films from 15% to 5%, increasing by contrast taxes on showing foreign films to 20–25%, a measure that was openly intended to stimulate the circulation of national productions. The latter were also given many kinds of assistance in the form of subsidies, loans at low interest rates (under 5%), exemption from certain taxes, assistance with distribution both national and international and so on.[11] In March 1983, the Cabinet established an informal but effective code of censorship, which was also helpful in clarifying to a certain extent the confusing state of affairs of previous years. As a result of these explicit guidelines covering film production, together with the Farabi Cinema Foundation's supervision of film scripts (which had to be submitted for prior review), the number of Iranian films banned by the censors fell dramatically – in fact, very few were banned in their entirety. Iranian films thus began to reach the general public on a regular basis, enjoying the more than favourable conditions afforded by a captive market. The policy of reactivating the cinema industry was immediately rewarded with a gradual increase in general production; this was the prime objective of the authorities, rather than the making of a mere handful of 'quality' films outside mainstream cinema. Naturally, this out-and-out support of film production was bound to arouse intense debate about the financial priorities of the government in a difficult situation caused by the bloody war with Iraq, but at all costs the Iranian film industry was reborn, with a verve and quality hitherto unknown.

From 1983 onwards, the Fajr International Film Festival in Tehran, conceived essentially as an annual showcase for national productions (together with similar categories dedicated to prominent foreign films and personages), came to provide a magnificent platform for the promotion of Iranian cinema. However, the real battle had to be won in cinemas themselves (now few in number,

despite the progressive reopening of some after the Revolution), and that is where the results were most encouraging. At the same time annual production stabilized at about 40 films. Iranian cinema, as had been hoped, overtook foreign films in popularity (in a highly 'rigged' marketplace), producing some big box-office successes. While in 1983 Iranian films had drawn audiences of just one million, compared with the seven million who went to see foreign films, by 1985 total audiences for national productions had risen to 7.6 million, against 5.6 million for foreign imports.[12] In 1987, *The Tenants* (*Ejarenesinha*), an amusing satirical comedy by Dariush Mehrjui, became the biggest box-office success in the history of Iranian cinema, with total audiences of two million – a record that still stands. The health of the cinema industry seemed to be recovering at a remarkable pace. But the creation of cinema that was high-quality, brilliant and innovative was a task still to be achieved.

The recovery of the sector and the new official guidelines inevitably transformed the commercial cinema scene in Iran. The propaganda films against the Shah and in praise of the Revolution were succeeded after 1983 by new subjects and genres. Naturally, the war with Iraq inspired the production of a fair number of war films, often mere imitations of Hollywood-type productions, dressed up with the obligatory slogans and pompous propaganda. Numerous comedies followed in the wake of *The Tenants,* with varying success, but in the course of time it was melodrama in its many forms that came to be most popular in Iranian cinemas. Thrillers and costume dramas completed the picture. Popular entertainment films, a genre that was never questioned as long as it respected Islamic principles and values, thus commanded a significant audience share. Nevertheless, the Islamic authorities never hid their tastes and preferences, and during this same period, for example, they made considerable efforts to promote so-called 'mystical cinema', a local variation of the hermetic style and philosophical concerns of certain foreign directors who were respected by the regime (Tarkovski being at the top of the list).

The success of the Iranian government's new cinema policy was certainly not immediate or guaranteed. On the contrary, the majority

of films made in the early years (between 1983 and 1986, at least) were hardly better than the mediocre collection of the previous period, even if the authorities preferred to take a pragmatic line and authorize them as a matter of course (provided they conformed to Islamic values), in order not to demoralize an industry surging to recovery. *The Runner* (*Davandeh*, 1985), by Amir Naderi, the first great international success of Iranian cinema, is in this sense an exceptional film, which owes everything to the perseverance of its maker. Produced by the Centre for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, which at that time had assumed the role of the sole promoter of Iranian films abroad, the film was shown at the Venice and London film festivals and shortly afterwards was awarded the Grand Prize at the Nantes Three Continents Festival. *The Runner* therefore gave notice that something was happening in Iranian cinema. The latter's continuing low international profile, which was due to internal political upheavals and the inherent conflicts of being in a state of war, as well as Iran's negative image in the international media, would not soon be overcome, despite the brave efforts of the Farabi Cinema Foundation. In reality, before 1989 Iranian cinema had no significant presence on the world stage; 1990 was the year that it really 'took off', doubtless coinciding with the large-scale retrospective organized by the Festival of Pesaro.[13]

The Runner is, however, a perfect example of the continued presence of the 'top brass' among Iranian film-makers after the Revolution. Although a new and brilliant generation of young producers certainly burst onto the film-making scene in the 1980s (Mohsen Makhmalbaf, Rakhshan Bani-Etemad, Ebrahim Hatamikia, etc.), all the great figures of the *Sinema-ye motefavet* of the previous decade resumed their careers during this time, such as Naderi, Mehrjui, Beyzai, Ayyari and Kimiai, among others.[14] In reality, as a general rule, only the more openly commercial film-makers would see their careers cut short during the post-revolutionary period (for all that some, like the prolific Samuel Khachikian, one of the great veterans of the profession, managed to continue to be active). As for Kiarostami himself, there is no doubt that Kanun – still very active in the 1980s under the direction of Ali Reza Zarrin – served

as an excellent refuge and protection that enabled him to continue his activities on the (relative) margins of the great upheavals in the government's cultural policies. When he was asked on one occasion about this, he explained: 'The Revolution, this Islamic period, hasn't had the same influence on everyone. People who didn't have that much originality in their work are doing things differently today – they change their subjects or their techniques. But for people like myself, it's the continuation of the same line. If you could see the films I made before, that would confirm the unity, the harmony, in my work.'[15] This does not mean, of course, that the echoes of the Revolution cannot be clearly heard in the Kiarostami *corpus*.

Zéro de Conduite

Direct and openly marked by the experience of the Revolution, *Case No. 1, Case No. 2* obviously constitutes an anomaly not only within Kiarostami's career but also in the history of Iranian cinema itself. But the ironic reflection rehearsed in *Orderly or Disorderly?*, one of his first films made under the new regime, shot in the tense atmosphere of 1981, is probably not entirely innocent, nor can the film really be considered as a mere cinematic joke. The same could apply to *The Chorus*, his next short, in which Iranian critics unhesitatingly recognized 'evident parabolic features'.[16] In the same way, Jean Breschand believes that the story of the film has ideological undertones: '*The Chorus* in the end acquires the tone of a fable, and the final play with shots and reverse angle shots underlines a generation gap in which the contrast between the two extreme ends of a lifetime also serves, in 1982, three years after the downfall of the Shah, to reflect the political contrast represented by two opposing ideas of citizenship: one held by those who feel themselves to be an integral part of the community, and the other by those who choose to distance themselves from it.'[17] For all that Kiarostami doubtless treats the old man, the protagonist of the film, with affection and sympathy, the image of the turmoil

in the street caused by the gathering of his granddaughters and their little friends, shouting to him to open the door (which he does not do until he has put his hearing aid back on and can hear them) is perhaps not as innocuous either, as it first appears.

Fellow Citizen, the first medium-length feature made by Kiarostami after the Revolution, arouses particular interest in this context. Although produced, as usual, by Kanun, it has nothing to do with the realm of childhood or education and is in many ways a disconcerting film. *Fellow Citizen* is difficult to watch with enjoyment, at least in the traditional meaning of the word; it is 'an interminable medium-length feature whose monotony borders on the limits of the experimental genre, forcing the attention capacity of its audience to the limit'.[18] For 50 minutes, Kiarostami films from a distance, with a telephoto lens (although the camera is not hidden), the titanic struggle between a traffic policeman and dozens of citizens who, one by one, battle to be allowed into a zone that the council has temporarily cordoned off. The camera captures, with monotonous regularity, the repetitive conversations between the drivers and the policeman; they all without exception have some good reason for crossing the barrier, and they come out with their best persuasive or purely histrionic skills, in order to convince him. As in any one of Warhol's well-known experiments, the audience is allowed very little room for choice in what to look at, but, surprisingly, the curious dialectic of the citizens seems at times to be inspired by Ionesco or Beckett.[19]

Fellow Citizen inevitably evokes Kiarostami's work as a young person in the Traffic Department of his city, but it is clear that this association is in the end merely superficial. In reality, 'the interests of the director are not confined to the drivers' lack of discipline or the ungovernability of Tehran's traffic. The latter is just the simple and concrete *avatar* of the film's real theme: Disorder, the changing face of Medusa, which is shown once more to be a source of fascination for Kiarostami'.[20] Once again, the idea of the film as a kind of parable, which might require certain keys of interpretation to reach a better understanding, is strongly suggested. In an early article dating from 1991, Yves Thoraval was already making the

perceptive suggestion that *Fellow Citizen* could possibly be seen as 'a parable [....] of the age-old skill of the Iranians in contravening laws which they consider to be unfair', insinuating, to be precise, a possible 'allusion to the current regime'.[21] But what governs the strange universe that lies behind the monotonous images of *Fellow Citizen* is in fact the rule of the lie: with extraordinary aplomb, the succession of drivers filmed by Kiarostami's discreet camera comes out with all kinds of excuses, some plausible, others completely improbable, in the form of direct appeals or invoking the Prophet and the *Qur'an*, to try to get past the police checkpoint. In the final analysis, as Oksana Bulgakowa suggested in her incisive study of this period of Kiarostami's career, the game takes an extraordinary turn towards the mere unmasking of the lie.[22]

'This is all part of our culture [...] We have learned that in order to survive, we must hide behind a lie',[23] declared Kiarostami in a different context. Probably in an involuntary way, *Fellow Citizen* seems, however, to evoke some of the passages of the highly celebrated didactic poem of Sufi origin by Fariduddin Attar, *The Assembly of Birds*, specifically the elaborate battery of excuses provided by the birds to escape the long journey in search of the legendary Simorgh.[24] Like the birds, the drivers use all their skill in inventing lies, which are free-thinking but not very public-spirited, without caring very much if they are found out: a simple smile is usually enough to clear up the matter with the long-suffering agent of the law. Like a giant distorting mirror, *Fellow Citizen* strips bare a rather weak conception of the *res publica*, and becomes instead 'a kind of monstrous metaphor of society as conflict',[25] in the elegant and accurate words of Laurent Roth; or even, in the more radical interpretation of Hamid Dabashi, 'as a subversive examination of how human societies operate on the verge of total collapse into anarchy'.[26] Against this very backdrop of the traumatic reorganization of Iranian society in the years immediately following the Islamic Revolution, this atypical Kanun film, in which the documentary format is just the alibi for a deliberate incursion into a kind of theatre of the absurd, remains without the slightest doubt one of the most exciting experiments of Kiarostami's career.

Fellow Citizen can be considered, moreover, as Kiarostami's first experience with the documentary as such, if indeed we agree to define it in this way. The film-maker himself, after explaining the particular situation that gave rise to the film (a traffic regulation campaign by the Tehran city council) and his desire to capture it on film, also made abundantly clear that his material had been subject to a high degree of manipulation – of form, at least – reducing eighteen hours of footage to under one hour in the final cut. In addition, Kiarostami claims not to have the intention of making documentaries or, in any case, not to understand them as being neutral records of reality, something that is impossible by definition but also strictly undesirable for a film-maker.[27] However, falling halfway between what might be considered simple educational documentaries (*Colours*, *Tribute to the Teacher*, *Toothache*, for all their special features) and the more ambitious films he would soon undertake in the second half of the 1980s (*First Graders* and *Homework*), *Fellow Citizen* undoubtedly represents the axis of a career that was being substantially redefined during this period.

Before starting to shoot *First Graders*, Kiarostami worked for the State Television (Seda va Sima-ye Jomhuri-ye Eslami-e Iran, or Voice and Vision of the Islamic Republic) on a series called *Fear and Suspicion*, never broadcast and about which very little is known. The series consisted, apparently, of thirteen 45-minute episodes, in which short film clips were shown and then various spectators were asked their opinions about them; they were finally analyzed and discussed by a psychologist. Still unseen (it is not even clear how many episodes were filmed, but probably not more than one or two), *Fear and Suspicion* was first and foremost a project that was too 'different' for *mullahvision*,[28] as popular wit had taken to calling it; as such, it is not surprising that the series was never given a slot in the monotonous programming of the state television network in those years. In the mid-1980s (and this could be regarded as a reliable indicator of Kiarostami's search for new directions), he stepped up his collaboration with certain colleagues at Kanun in scriptwriting and editing some of their projects. Although there had been precedents in his film-making career, the partnership

he formed with Ebrahim Foruzesh between 1985 and 1989 is especially significant, first, because of their long-standing and solid friendship (as the first director of the Kanun film-making department, Foruzesh had been Kiarostami's boss for many years) and, second, because it led to the joint production of the delightful *The Key* (*Kelid*, 1987), based on a script by Kiarostami.[29]

The trials of Amir Mohammad, a four-year-old boy whose mother leaves him locked in the apartment while she goes shopping, chime equally well with the norms of Kanun – the producer of the film – and with the Kiarostami-type universe of stubborn and determined child heroes. Amir Mohammad is left in charge of his baby brother and of the food that his mother has left cooking. A series of small domestic accidents make his task more difficult, but suddenly a gas leak creates a real danger. Amir Mohammad's calls for help go unaided, because no-one has a key to the apartment and his mother cannot be found: alone, he must find out how to turn the gas off and find the front-door key to escape. This domestic odyssey, shot by Foruzesh with a firm hand, a sense of humour and a few moments of suspense, was not, however, authorized for foreign release until two years later and not screened in Iran itself for four years, on the grounds that it could clearly be understood in metaphorical terms. The freedom that little Amir Mohammad gains all by himself – once again we see Kiarostami's hope in the bravery and decisions of the younger generation – does indeed lend itself to socio-political interpretations that were not to everyone's taste.[30]

The world of childhood and its problems had been the focus of Kiarostami's attention from the making of his first short, *Bread and Alley*; the duo of films formed by *First Graders* and *Homework* would bring a new perspective to his work. Investigation replaces fiction, partly no doubt because of the changes that had taken place in his own private life. According to the statement he made during an interview with Godfrey Cheshire – perhaps his only public comment on the subject – Kiarostami decided to stay in Iran after the Islamic Revolution 'because an internal revolution was taking place in my household: I was getting separated from my wife and was going to take care of my two sons, so it was impossible for me to think of

leaving the country'.[31] Bahman, the younger, was not yet two, while Ahmad, the older son, was right in the middle of his schooling: the director's family life therefore made heavy demands on his time. *First Graders*, probably one of the weakest links in Kiarostami's film work, can and should be seen in this sense as a hurried reflection on children's first contact with school, as well as a tentative first draft of his masterly *Homework*. *First Graders* shows the first day of school for young pupils in one of the many Tehran schools, but we can soon tell that what happens in the classroom is not what interests the director. This tale of initiation in fact takes place in two other settings: the playground and the headmaster's office. The first is the setting for various comings and goings, such as the gym class; the second, for reprimands of pupils who have been naughty ... or who simply have yet to learn the rules of an institution that is still new to them. Kiarostami accurately shows the socializing role of school, the decisive part it plays in the teaching of values, but also the methods used to teach discipline.[32] In this way, the interrogations in the headmaster's office form the backbone of the film and impose a single meaning on the various events filmed by the director: this first contact with school is also the first contact with a world made up of rules, which must necessarily be learned and obeyed as quickly as possible. Some critics have read a strongly political message into *First Graders,* seeing the school's headmaster as a symbol of totalitarianism, a tyrannical figure who embodies the age-old oppression suffered by the Iranian people.[33] Such an interpretation does not seem justified, however, judging by the images themselves and the essential ambivalence with which Kiarostami approaches his material. But although it is true, as several critics have stressed,[34] that it is difficult to define the director's 'point of view' with respect to the figure of the headmaster and the values he represents, *First Graders* emerges in any event as an 'intimate celebration of innocence'[35] and a testimonial to the purity of childhood, which arouses spontaneous feelings of sympathy and identification.

Homework, made four years later,[36] develops some of the themes of *First Graders* and refines its methods. In reality, the similarities in structure and the common theme of educational (and political, we

might add) issues of both films are somewhat deceptive. *Homework* is a much more complex, rich and polished film than its pallid predecessor. Once again, the film is based on Kiarostami's personal experience, as he himself explains in the opening sequence – off camera – to the headmaster of the school where he wants to film:[37] 'I've had problems helping my son with his homework. Homework is handed out to children, but it affects us grown-ups too. That's why I decided to bring my cameras here, to find out whether it's just my son's problem or if it has something to do with the actual education system. We want to get other parents' and children's points of view. Actually, I would say that it's not so much a film in the usual sense as pictorial research.' He refuses, however, to consider the film *a priori* a documentary, at least not a conventional one: 'You ask if it's a documentary,' he says, answering, 'I don't know, we can only tell when it's finished.' Kiarostami's methodology was to distribute a questionnaire among more than 800 parents to identify those children who had problems with school work, select a group of 30-odd schoolchildren, then proceed to interview them one by one, always about the problem of homework. Apart from a few brief but important sequences in the school playground and the interviews with two of the parents, *Homework* is organized very strictly around this series of interrogations, exploring once again the possibilities offered by the structure of repetition, which had produced such good results in *Fellow Citizen.*

So the schoolchildren, in close-up, file up to go in front of the camera in a ritual that undoubtedly reminds us of Ghassem's friends in the symbolic sequence of the fake photograph-taking in *The Traveller.*[38] Occasionally, a quick reverse-angle shot shows Kiarostami, with his film crew, asking the questions or answering the boys. In fact, as he later confessed to Stéphane Goudet, this device was only thought of after the event, when at the editing stage the director decided to incorporate some form of 'punctuation marks' between the interviews, and proceeded to film the (fictitious) reverse-angle shots in his own home.[39] This is probably not the only instance of how the raw material shot in the school underwent significant manipulation. For one thing, 'there's

a notable (and possibly fictitious) deterioration in the interviews from the first boys, smiling, confident, meeting the camera squarely, to the final ones, fidgeting and mumbling as if on the edge of collapse'.[40] The rigorous editing and organization of the raw footage are doubtless what lies behind this very noticeable effect; but there is always the possibility that a demiurgic Kiarostami consciously manipulated the situation; he was later accused of terrifying the children with his abrupt manner and his dark glasses, as though he were a common gangster or a police inspector.[41]

This has none of the tepidity of *First Graders.* Here we are confronted with 'an open denunciation, an outright condemnation of the system of continual humiliations and physical punishment suffered by Iranian children, in public and in private alike'.[42] Some critics go even further and stress the profoundly repressive and violent side of the Iranian education system, strictly based on discipline and punishment, where the notions of 'stimulation', 'incentive' and 'reward' have no meaning whatsoever.[43] 'My memories of school are still traumatic',[44] Kiarostami confessed in the 1990s, and in *Homework* we can see why. Even after editing out a good number of the interviews recorded in nearly seven hours of filming, 'because they were so sad', Kiarostami clearly confirms that what was happening in the school he visited, one among many in his city and in his country, 'was terrifying'.[45] Just one and a half hours long, with no exaggerated or strident display of feeling, *Homework* is nevertheless a masterly reflection of this regime of terror and oppression: just the words and the silences of the children, their lies and the expressions on their faces inform the audience about their situation. Through their testimonies, a complex radiography emerges with overwhelming clarity, not only of the school system, but also of the whole of Iranian society of that period. The children talk about their families and their homes, innocently revealing aspects of their domestic lives that the adults would never want to air. Illiteracy, ignorance, unemployment, polygamy, exploitation of young children, physical violence... all these form part of the domestic alphabet that *Homework* reveals in an oblique but extraordinarily effective way.

The children interviewed in the film frequently resort to lying

as a self-defence mechanism. But the lies are really part of *their* truth.[46] Asked by the 'menacing' Kiarostami whether they preferred doing their homework or watching cartoons on television, they all invariably answered that they preferred doing their homework. Their testimonies therefore not only offer valuable information about a family life that is inaccessible to the spectator but also embody and reproduce the discourse of their parents as a protective – presumably ideal – shield against their interrogator, an adult who after all is not 'one of us' and who wouldn't understand their logic. 'So it appears that a good part of the tuition consists in learning to stifle their natural instincts and master the meek deportment officially demanded of them. These children don't lack all individuality; it only seems so. For a primary socialization has already taught them that survival depends on gauging the distance between private desire and acceptable public face.'[47] However, there are many chinks in the armour, and in the end childish candour and enthusiasm break out irrepressibly, as in so many other Kiarostami films.

The particular historical background, for example, is half-glimpsed throughout all the children's declarations.[48] One of the children confides innocently that when he grows up he wants to be a *komiteh* agent to arrest and put in jail drug addicts, crooks, etc.[49]; another tells his interviewer all about a 'very interesting' film he has just seen about the war with Iraq. One of the great moments of the film comes when least expected, in an answer to precisely one of these many routine questions:

> 'What would you like to be when you grow up?'
> 'A pilot.'
> 'Why?'
> 'To kill Saddam. He's bad. He destroys houses.'
> 'And what if Saddam is already dead by the time you're grown up, what would you like to be then?'

The child, taken aback, does not know what to answer. A long silence follows, until he finds an alternative and explains confusedly

that he would also like to be a surgeon. The deep wounds left by a long war that has only just ended appear repeatedly throughout the film, and the ominous shades of the Iraqi invasion dominate the religious chanting-rhythmic exercises in the school playground:

> One, two, three and four
> Two, three, four and five
> Victory to our warriors
> Three, four, five and six
> Curses on the followers of Saddam.

At times the school looks like an army barracks, absurdly as if martial discipline were the real objective of primary education.[50] A barracks, however, dominated by religion: 'Glory to victorious Islam! Down with the East and down with the West! Oh, Allah, bless Mohammad and his people!' chant the children every morning before going into class.

As if Kiarostami's point of view was not already perfectly clear from his deliberate organization of the footage and from the very construction of the film, the first of the two fathers interviewed, a man in his 50s who claims to have lived abroad for many years for work reasons, outlines certain ideas that Kiarostami – nodding twice in a reverse-angle shot – definitely shares. 'All the subjects are mixed up with religion', he complains, and insists on the urgent need for reform of an education system based on coercion, and which completely stifles the children's creativity. His critical comments conclude with: 'We must teach children to think.' Kiarostami knows perfectly well that the real Gordian knot of the issue is strictly political, and he does not hesitate to underline it – implicitly and explicitly – with all the means at his disposal. In this way, the splendid and famous final sequence of the prayers in the playground constitutes a real *tour de force* by the director.

Towards the end of the film the children go back to the playground where, in ordered rows, they must chant a collective prayer. As if this were a perfect demonstration of a long-standing Kiarostami theory, orderly behaviour becomes increasingly

impossible to achieve and the children (still reciting the proper slogans) get distracted, start playing around ... It is not exactly a cheering spectacle, and after receiving complaints from conservative religious factions, Kiarostami cut the soundtrack to spare the audience from listening to a prayer recited in such a tiresome, automatic and finally not very devout way.[51] Kiarostami's voice-over gives a perfect explanation: 'In spite of all the care taken by those in charge to make sure the ceremony is properly carried out, this has not been possible, and therefore, as a gesture of respect, we have decided to shut off the soundtrack.' The deeply subversive effect of the sequence is, however, magnified by this action, and it is not surprising that the censors were equally unhappy with this solution; they cut the scene from all the copies to be shown in Iran.[52] In any case, the education authorities, fearful of the possible reaction from hardline religious elements, ended up by banning the whole film for three years and then authorizing it for adult viewing only.[53]

The hidden virulence of Kiarostami's discourse finds expression, however, in the brilliant and beautiful final sequence, consisting of the most distressing of his interviews but one that in the end exudes a greater tenderness and stubborn hope. The last boy to be interviewed (in the edited version, obviously) is utterly terrified and cannot stop crying and calling for his best friend. Even when Kiarostami calls the friend, who remains in a discreet background shot, the boy manages only to murmur, frightened, that they have to go to their religion lesson and they mustn't miss it for anything. Kiarostami then asks him to recite a prayer for the camera, a prayer that is completely different from the warlike chants of the playground, which finally calms him down and which Kiarostami undoubtedly makes his own.[54] The extraordinary *Homework* ends with this poem, followed by a freeze-frame shot of the boy's face:

> Oh, Lord of the beautiful stars,
> Oh, Lord of the many-coloured universe,
> Thou, who hast created Venus,
> Thou, who hast created the Sun and the Moon,

> the mountains and the oceans,
> the lovely colours of the trees,
> the tiny wings of butterflies,
> and the nests of birds,
> eyes for us to see them,
> rain and snow,
> heat and cold,
> Thou, who hast made all these things,
> Thou, who hast granted all my wishes,
> Fill our hearts with joy and happiness.

Journey to Nowhere

Where Is the Friend's House?, made exactly halfway between *First Graders* and *Homework*, nevertheless took Kiarostami back to the domain of fiction, a promising area, which (practically the only exception being the short *The Chorus*) he had not been able to progress since the Revolution. Kiarostami himself argues convincingly that *Where Is the Friend's House?* forms in one sense a kind of cross-fertilizing diptych with *Homework*: 'In *Homework* the children talk about what is then seen in *Where Is the Friend's House?*; and *Where Is the Friend's House?* shows that what the children say in *Homework* is true.'[55]

The credits, superimposed on a classroom door, with the background noise of schoolchildren, place us in already quite familiar territory. Indeed, this little country school, in a remote village of the Gilan province, Koker, does not seem very different from the school in *The Traveller*; nor are this teacher's disciplinary methods very far removed from those of the authoritarian teacher figure in that film, Kiarostami's first full-length feature. The constant emphasis on discipline takes the form of a string of instructions and prohibitions, in an atmosphere of fear and oppression. Homework is once again the keystone of the whole system, and the central element in *Where Is the Friend's House?* Young Ahmad takes home by mistake the exercise book of his classmate Mohammad Reza, who

has already been severely reprimanded for not doing his homework; so Mohammad Reza will not be able to do it that night either, and the next morning he will certainly be expelled from school.

As soon as he gets home and realizes this, Ahmad wants to take the exercise book straight back to his classmate, but he is faced with two problems: first, his mother, hardly listening to his explanations, refuses to let him go and, second, he doesn't know Mohammad Reza's address, just that he lives in the neighbouring village of Poshteh. After trying over and over again to persuade his mother to let him go, getting in reply only instructions about various domestic chores, Ahmad decides in spite of everything to go and look for his classmate's house, to give back the exercise book before it is too late. Ahmad is therefore none other than the prototype of a Kiarostami hero, in whom solitude and tenacity go hand in hand as basic personality traits.[56] But Hamid Dabashi is probably right to address the issue in even more specific terms: 'as Kiarostami's *alter ego*, Ahmad is *different* in the strongest sense of the term',[57] and this difference, tinged inevitably with solitude and isolation, leads him to ignore systematically the rules and requirements of all the figures of authority (teacher, mother, grandfather, neighbours) to do what he thinks is right, an act of solidarity with his classmate.[58] There is also an undeniable element of responsibility in the boy's behaviour (as revealed in the film's twin sources of inspiration[59]), but undoubtedly the heroism displayed by Ahmad, who must undergo various trials, confront the threat of the unknown and overcome his fears, is based above all on his determined commitment to solidarity and cooperation.[60]

As in previous films by Kiarostami, *Where Is the Friend's House?* presents a world that is enormously hostile, even aggressive, to children. There is a complete lack of communication between the generations, because there is also a complete lack of interest on the part of the adults in the child's world. Ignored by his mother, who hardly listens to his explanations and comes out with a constant litany of orders and instructions, Ahmad appeals to whomever he meets on his way for information about his classmate's address, but he gets no real help, not even from those who have the decency to listen.

The encounter with his grandfather in the *shaikhane* (tea-house) is of paramount importance from this perspective. His grandfather asks him sharply where he has sprung from and sends him to buy cigarettes. While Ahmad is on this errand, the only period in the whole film when he is absent from the screen, his grandfather has the following conversation with a neighbour who offers him a cigarette:

> 'Here, have a cigarette.'
>
> 'No thanks, I've got some ... I didn't send him to buy a packet because I need any, it was to teach him manners and obedience, so that he'll turn out a good citizen. When I was a boy, my father used to give me ten cents a week and every fortnight he gave me a good walloping. Sometimes he forgot the ten cents, but he always remembered the walloping. And all that was to teach me manners and turn me into a useful member of society.'
>
> 'And what if the boy takes no notice of you?'
>
> 'If he takes no notice, I'll wallop him. Like I said, my father walloped me every fortnight to teach me manners, and he never forgot.'
>
> 'But if the boy is obedient and does nothing wrong ...'
>
> 'Well then, I'll find a good reason to give him a walloping every fortnight that he won't forget ...'

Ahmad's disobedience should not be seen as a simple and trivial escapade in search of his friend's house, but as a genuine rejection of the suffocating rules of a patriarchal system governed by the weight of tradition, by a closed order that is a small-scale version of the 'rules of the game' of an oppressive society. In this way, 'young Ahmad throws off the ties which bind him to a family that reproduces in the microcosm of the parent-child relationship the macrocosm of the Islamic political, social and religious system, regulated by eternal laws [...], a closed world stagnating in the negligence of a cowardly indifference'.[61]

However, the successive stages of Ahmad's journey to Poshteh

soon lead the film onto paths that are completely different and new in Kiarostami's career. Of course, its similarities with the director's earlier films are obvious; Kiarostami declared himself surprised to find, once the film was made, so many features that he had already used in his *opera prima*, the short *Bread and Alley*[62] (the boy, the alleys, the old man, the dogs). It is even possible to suggest the influence of specific films, such as *A Simple Event* by Sohrab Shahid Saless or *The Runner* by Amir Naderi.[63] Notwithstanding the above, the truth is that *Where Is the Friend's House?* creates its own universe, of great poetic and symbolic depth, which requires careful unravelling. Ahmad's short journey to Poshteh becomes in reality a voyage of discovery – and appraisal – of a world hitherto unknown to the young boy, a moral and spiritual voyage with profound symbolic resonances, where the constant use of repetition acquires a quality of initiation.[64]

Where Is the Friend's House? is in fact structured around numerous repetitions, most significant of which involves the two journeys to Poshteh. Filmed in exactly the same way, in the same places and from identical perspectives, Ahmad's route is like a ritual with set and unavoidable stages. In a different way, his search is merely reduced to a constant plaintive appeal for information about where his friend's house is, repeating his questions over and over again. All the characters repeat themselves: dialogue seems impossible in this world of almost metaphysical lack of communication. As Majid Eslami says in his excellent analysis of the film, at times 'the repetition is so much here that it gets distanced from the realistic dialogues and becomes abstract', in the same way as poetry makes use of repetition in order to achieve certain rhyming effects, and in pursuit, therefore, of aesthetic goals that have nothing to do with naturalness of expression.[65] But the most frequent response that Ahmad hears is 'I don't know'. After all his trials, nobody can tell him where Mohammed Reza lives and night begins to fall, implacably, without his having returned his classmate's exercise book. Not even the old carpenter, the only person who seems prepared to help him, albeit in his own way, is any real support in that expressionist night when the wind begins to blow through the village's dark labyrinth of alleyways, dogs bark in the distance, doors and windows start to

creak; the twinkling glow escaping magically from inside the houses only increases Ahmad's fear and distress. Defeated, he returns home, and a drastic ellipsis tells us no more about this part of the story.[66]

All of a sudden, Kiarostami next shows us Ahmad already at home: he doesn't want any dinner and goes into the next room, to do 'his' homework. We cannot be absolutely sure about what has happened, although we can easily imagine. As David Oubiña maintains in what could well remain as one of the best introductions to Kiarostami's work, 'nothing in the scene seems to suggest punishment, but everything is charged with the ominous weight of guilt [...] The ellipsis is here not a question of narrative economy, but a well thought-out dramatic device. Kiarostami decides not to show the scolding, not in order to eliminate a dead time (the event is of central importance), but in order to recover it as contained violence'.[67] Ahmad shuts himself away silently in his room, while the storm that had been forecast breaks out overhead; now calm, unafraid and sure of himself, he does his homework. The next morning, at the last possible moment, he manages to give the exercise book back to a terrified Mohammad Reza; the teacher does not discover that Ahmad has copied his homework into his classmate's exercise book, thereby saving him from certain expulsion. Satisfied, he ticks the piece of work without apparently noticing the flower – a symbol of innocence and altruism in the Persian poetic tradition[68] – that the old carpenter gave to Ahmad the night before, which is now serving as a bookmark in Mohammad Reza's book.

In this way, therefore, Ahmad finally achieves his object, despite not being able to find the house of his classmate, now undoubtedly a friend and accomplice up against the strange world of adults. Once again, as with Ghassem in *The Traveller* or the three teenage boys in *A Suit for the Wedding*, the lie emerges as the preferred weapon of childhood; only by deceiving the teacher has Ahmad been able to ward off the threatened blind injustice. But, in reality, Ahmad's ruse involves a creativity and an imagination that are completely lacking in the world around him, including of course in his own school. Strictly speaking, as Laurent Roth points out, the homework and the exercise books are not even absolutely identical now, because

the flower – with all its history and its symbolism – makes them different.[69] Lies, as Kiarostami himself has very frequently insisted, can be a productive form of truth: 'The most important thing is how we make use of a string of lies to arrive at a greater truth. Lies which are not real, but which are true in some way. That is what's important.'[70]

Despite his already established reputation in Iran as a realist director,[71] Kiarostami very obviously abandons this approach in *Where Is the Friend's House?*. And although certain short-sighted critics, both Iranian and foreign, would continue for a long time to claim (with little subtlety) this connection, the director explained at the outset how impulsively he had behaved during filming. Like Satyajit Ray during the filming of *The Song of the Road* (*Pather Panchali*, 1955) – another great film linked with the neo-realist tradition in too simplistic a way[72] – Kiarostami conveniently (re)constructed all the settings.[73] Streets, houses and even the landscape were redesigned to meet the needs or simply the demands of the director, whose objectives were undoubtedly clear and which definitely did not include yielding to realist dogmas.

Houshang Golmakani was probably the only person who saw this at the time and explained it clearly: 'The truth is that this film has nothing realist about it. Rather, we should talk about an "idealist" film, at least in the sense that its director has carefully designed his shots to present before our eyes, in front of the camera, his own [vision of a] Utopian society. There are no negative characters in it. Everything is clean and sterilized. The director has gone to the extremes of cleaning all the streets and alleys in the village, having the walls repaired and painted bright blue and white, even adding pots of flowers. The path that Ahmad takes has also been tidied up, all logs and bushes removed, so that the purity of his sacrifice is matched on the screen by a clear open space, free of obstacles and "defects"'.[74] Beyond the detail, Golmakani's explanation takes on particular relevance when other evidence strongly suggests the possibility of interpreting *Where Is the Friend's House?* as a parable with deep philosophical meaning.

Where Is the Friend's House? not only opens with a dedication to the great Iranian poet and painter Sohrab Sepehri (1928–1980)

but the film's actual title is a direct quotation from one of his best-known poems, *Neshani*. One of the greatest exponents of Iranian *shaer-e nou* (new poetry) in the second half of the 20th century, as well as an outstanding figure in contemporary plastic arts, Sepehri has come to be considered – not unreasonably – as the poetic counterpart or equivalent to Kiarostami, a kind of lyrical *alter ego*, with whom he certainly shares multiple and significant points of contact.[75] A lonely soul, always on the fringes of literary and artistic fashions and trends, Sepehri graduated in teaching and fine arts, then worked for several years in government administration, at the same time pursuing his artistic career and travelling abroad to exhibit his work or to further his artistic education. His stay in Japan in 1960 left a deep impression on him, and would bring important influences to bear on his poetry and painting alike. His conception of art, deeply imbued with mysticism, is, however, linked in a special way with the great Persian poetic tradition, and it should be contemplated in this light.[76] *Address*, the poem whose first line was borrowed by Kiarostami for the title of *Where Is the Friend's House?*, openly subscribes to this tradition of mysticism, of remote Sufi inspiration, which characterizes the best of his literary work.[77]

Address

In the false-dawn twilight
The rider asked,
'Where is the House of the Friend?'
The sky halted
a passer-by
had a branch of light
in his mouth which he gave
to the darkness of the sand
and pointed with his finger
to an aspen and said:
'Before you get to the tree
there's a garden-lane
more green than God's dream.

And in that garden-lane,
as far as the breadth of the wing-spread
of candor, love is blue.
You go to the end of that lane
which appears behind adolescence
then you turn
towards the flower of solitude
two steps more to the flower ...
at the foot of the mountain
of eternal myths you stop and stay
and a transparent fear envelops you.
In the intimacy of flowing space
you hear a rustling
you see a child
who has climbed up a pine tree
to pick up a chick
from the nest of light
and from the child you ask:
'Where is the House of the Friend?'[78]

The poem, which for Dariush Shayegan is a concentration of 'the main themes in the poetic topography of Sepehri's work',[79] conjures up the figure of the 'Friend' as soon as the poem begins; this is one of the names given to God in the great Persian poetic tradition, while the 'House of the Friend' is none other than the unattainable goal of the mystical quest. Admittedly, Kiarostami has not sought an exact correspondence between Sepehri's poem and his own film, nor has he been literally faithful to the narrative, but there are undoubtedly many analogies and common imagery, which point strongly to a powerful shared meaning. Ahmad's insistent questioning of people he encounters on his journey, the long walk along the 'garden-lane' that leads to a solitary tree, the signpost to turn in another direction, which leads 'to the end of that lane which appears behind adolescence', the 'flower of solitude' and the 'nest of light': these are directly echoed in many of the film's images and

motifs.[80] For the first time in his career, Kiarostami – hand in hand with Sepehri's beautiful poem – turns to symbolism; although these are simple and transparent symbols, not at all intended to turn *Where Is the Friend's House?* into an abstruse or hermetic film. If the meaning of the flower given by the old carpenter to Ahmad seems quite obvious, we could say the same of the zig-zag path, 'archetypal symbol of the snake and metaphor for desire',[81] or again of the tree on the crown of the hill, 'symbol of friendship' in Persian literature, according to Kiarostami's own explanation.[82] Both the tree and the winding path up the hill, which are of key importance within the imagery and symbolism of the film, were in fact 'created' by the director, where before there had been just a bare promontory. The reason could not be simpler: 'I had carried this image around in my mind for years, long before making the film, as you can see from my paintings and photographs from that time. It's as if I had always been subconsciously attracted by that hill and that solitary tree. So that is the image we wanted to reconstruct accurately in the film.'[83]

Ahmad's exhausting adventure must be seen, then, as a genuine journey of (self-)discovery, as a journey of initiation in the precise sense that this has in the Persian poetic and philosophic tradition. 'The journey,' says Kiarostami, 'forms part of our culture, and it is linked with mysticism; for us what is really important is not the goal we wish to attain, but the path we must travel [to reach it].'[84] This is certainly the case with Ahmad; despite all his efforts he does not succeed in finding his friend's house, but he nevertheless undergoes a deeply enriching and essential experience. For indeed, 'in accordance with tradition, the search for the house of the friend must fail, and sorrow must overcome us and confound our spirits, so that finally we may be able to discover that "the house of the friend" is nowhere other than inside ourselves'.[85] Mystical Persian poetry is full of sayings of this kind. For example: 'Seek the answer from the same quarter to which, in the hour of pain, thou bendest low', wrote Rumi in the *Mathnavi*, warning at the same time of the suffering inherent in such a search.[86] In the end, this and no other is the fundamental teaching of the previously cited allegorical poem by Fariduddin Attar, *The Assembly of Birds*, which Majid

Eslami compares specifically with the Kiarostami film[87]: the search for the legendary Simorgh, an extraordinary bird that dwells in the Caucasus mountains, turns into a long, difficult and hazardous journey for the few intrepid birds who dare to undertake it; in the end, the thirty who successfully arrive at their destination discover that the Simorgh (literally meaning 'thirty birds' in Farsi) is none other than themselves.

Although this is certainly a very complicated area, given, just to begin with, the difficulty in accurately surveying the vast terrain of overlap between classical Persian poetry and the Sufi spiritual tradition,[88] it is obvious that Kiarostami's references are not purely fortuitous nor even incidental. Rather, detailed analysis reveals new connections, such as the one concerning the figure of the old carpenter, who undoubtedly represents the *pir-e mogham* or spiritual teacher of Persian mysticism and poetry.[89] Once again, we can turn to Rumi's *Mathnavi* to illustrate the immense importance of this figure in Persian Sufi literature:

> Choose a Pir, for without a Pir this journey is exceedingly full of woe and affright and danger. Without an escort you are bewildered (even) on a road you have travelled many times before: Do not, then, travel alone on a Way you have not seen at all, do not turn your head away from the Guide.[90]

Unquestionably, the carpenter, making his unexpected appearance as the magic night falls over Poshteh, fulfils in *Where Is the Friend's House*? the role of guide that is attributed to the *pir* in Persian spiritual tradition. Friendly and patient, he is, significantly, the only person who seems to know how to get to Mohammad Reza's house. But the old man delights in telling Ahmad, in minute detail, how in his youth he made all the doors and windows in all the villages in the area, including the ones in the boy's house, which have been progressively replaced with new metal ones. The impatient Ahmad doesn't understand the meaning of his speech, and thinks only about how late it is already and how difficult it will be to return

the exercise book to his classmate. The old man's help does not turn out to be very useful, because he makes such slow progress that the journey seems unending; Ahmad can't imagine what time they will get to Mohammad Reza's house. In desperation, he decides to say goodbye politely and return home. Although he has not fulfilled his mission, Ahmad has been enriched by the old man's teachings (the flower in the final sequence is proof of this), which must obviously be interpreted as the fruit of a traditional wisdom that holds some value for the present day, but which at the same time is shown to be barren and ineffective. Kiarostami, although he takes pleasure in referring to all these Sufi-inspired elements, unmistakably advocates the need to transcend the weight of tradition and a paralyzing social inertia.[91]

Ahmad's spiritual triumph is, therefore, first and foremost a triumph of friendship, a central theme of classical Persian poetry, which, using the words of the poet Hafiz, Kiarostami also claims as a pivotal concept of his film work during Jean-Pierre Limosin's documentary *Abbas Kiarostami: Truths and Illusions* (1994).[92] But Emanuela Imparato is right to point out that the journey of initiation undertaken by Ahmad in search of his friend's house does not have to be seen *only* in symbolic and spiritual terms, since there are enough indications to suggest that 'in Kiarostami's parable we appreciate the real and specific *need* to change the old order for a new one'.[93] This is why it is important to qualify and keep in proportion Kiarostami's links with the Persian spiritual tradition; we should avoid understanding it (and the same applies to Sepehri himself) in a strictly mystical sense, set apart from the turbulent *hic et nunc*. As Laurent Roth says in his perceptive analysis of the film, *Where Is the Friend's House*? captures the spirit and the letter of Sepehri's poem so admirably because Kiarostami shares with him a spirituality that is 'opposed to the Pharisaical tradition of Islam, of its scholars, censors and inquisitors',[94] and lashes out at the fanaticism and oppression that hold sway in a society that he does not like. Kiarostami's attitude to traditional poetry of religious inspiration must therefore be carefully understood; the director himself gives us the best key to understanding it: 'We have a two-speed religion: one, behind the times, where the search does not

exist; another, more developed, where the search does indeed exist. Mystical Iranian poetry appeals precisely to the idea of the journey of initiation as a path of learning, and it is really the Iranian culture, in all its richness, that contains this idea, not the religious culture. Religion has merely followed in the wake of Iranian thought.'[95]

For various reasons, *Where Is the Friend's House?* was given a rather ambivalent (when not simply negative) reception in Iran. Although it received two important awards (Best Director and Jury Special Award) at the Fajr International Film Festival in Tehran, many critics opposed this acclaim and were particularly hard on the film, but Behzad Rahimian wins hands down: '*Where Is the Friend's House?* is pathetic. It's hard to believe that after twenty years in the business Kiarostami still hasn't learned what makes good cinema. This film is so primitive, the production is so crude [...] that I find it painful to have to review it. Besides, this is a film which is falsely idealistic. When you manage to get beyond this facade, it reveals itself to be in reality a model of gloomy cinema: in my opinion, the bitter tone deliberately adopted by Kiarostami is insupportable.'[96] But even critics who had until then been more supportive, such as Iraj Karimi, the author of the first monograph about Kiarostami's work the previous year, raised serious objections to the film on very differing grounds, although essentially agreeing that Kiarostami had rejected his usual approach in favour of some kind of commitment to the new cinematic policies of the regime; he had also abandoned the path of realism to lose himself in a confusing area, which, as many critics had long said of Kanun's productions, lacked any real audience.[97] Although the criticism clearly was not wholly negative and soon began to be reappraised, perhaps in the light of the film's positive reception by the public,[98] *Where Is the Friend's House?* undoubtedly disconcerted a number of those in Iran who had been following Kiarostami's career.

It is true that, in terms of style, *Where Is the Friend's House?* is not particularly radical (and this in fact has facilitated yet more interpretations, which emphasize, however mistakenly, its simplicity and transparency); but the film did break with the linearity of his previous films in various ways. Asier Aranzubia, in his rigorous

analysis, insists that its 'structure, [....] in a certain sense circular'[99] is one of the most important keys to a complete understanding of the film. This circularity, by the way, duly matches that of the Sepehri poem and is extremely important with regard to the journey of initiation that the latter evokes. In reality, it might be better to talk of a precise and finely calculated symmetrical structure, as demonstrated in Majid Eslami's meticulous breakdown, which shows a construction of seven large blocks (school/home/Poshteh/tea-room/Poshteh/home/school) and the sequence where Ahmad meets his authoritarian grandfather is revealed to be in central position.[100] There is no room to include here all the details of this outstanding study, but only to conclude that *Where Is the Friend's House?* contains a deceptively simple structure, which nevertheless avoids many of the usual narrative conventions of mainstream cinema, permitting once again interesting experiments with form, which Kiarostami over time will extend and refine.[101]

These considerations aside, *Where Is the Friend's House?* was to achieve genuine renown only as a result of its delayed international screening, at the Locarno International Film Festival in the summer of 1989. The Bronze Leopard was not only Kiarostami's first relatively important foreign award,[102] but also, and more significantly, it represented a magnificent sounding board for his work: after twenty years in the profession, the world's leading specialist reviews began to write about his films. The truth is that most of the reviews published at that time combined a certain element of surprise (Michel Ciment, in a penetrating and highly complimentary column in *Positif*, wondered if this was an *opera prima*...[103]) with uncertainty (*Variety* called it an 'agonizingly slow film', although finally giving it a favourable opinion[104]). There is no doubt, however, that this screening was very important, not only for Kiarostami's future international career but also for the fate of post-revolutionary Iranian cinema. Locarno, where the year before Nasser Taghvai's *Captain Khorshid (Nakhoda Khorshid,* 1986) had been shown – and given an award – would become the main point of entry to the West for Iranian productions,[105] coinciding above all with the new situation in the country following the end of the

war with Iraq. In his controversial review of post-revolutionary Iranian cinema, written and published in exile, Reza Allamehzadeh – an ex-colleague at Kanun, afterwards running the film-making activities of the *fedaiyan-e khalq* [Selfless Devotees for the People] – condemned the whole event, remarking that the screening of *Where Is the Friend's House?* in fact contravened the regulations of the Locarno Festival; Section C, Article 6 explicitly states that films presented in the competition must have been produced during the twelve months prior to the Festival.[106] But history was decidedly being rewritten. The film would not only bestow great international renown on Kiarostami; it must also be seen – from every point of view – as a genuine landmark in his film career.

CHAPTER THREE

Ashes and Diamonds

I cry out
across a deep valley
expecting the echo of my voice
Abbas Kiarostami

Adorable Lies

Let us put events back into their chronological order: after making *Where Is the Friend's House?*, a real turning point in Kiarostami's career, the director returned to the more familiar territory of films about childhood to shoot *Homework*. Nevertheless, this would also turn out to be an original experiment with form, and a film with a strong critical content. In the autumn of 1989, Kiarostami was preparing to shoot a new film, again for Kanun, about the pocket money given to children every week by their parents. However, just a few days before the date that had been set to begin shooting, the director came across an article in the weekly magazine *Sorush*

about the strange case of a man who had impersonated, with dubious motives, another director, Mohsen Makhmalbaf, and who had been unmasked before he could commit his (supposed) fraud. Kiarostami was literally fascinated by the case, and decided to investigate it as the possible subject for a film. He asked his producer at the Centre for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults for permission to cancel the existing project and explore this new possibility. After talking to Makhmalbaf, who agreed to work with Kiarostami on the project, both film-makers went to the prison at Ghasr to have a preliminary interview with the impostor; afterwards they went to see the Ahankhah family, also to negotiate their participation in the film. In the light of their recent experiences, it is not surprising that the family now suspected a swindle by a 'fake Kiarostami', and demanded to see both men's credentials before even allowing them into the house ...[1]

While the impostor, Hossein Sabzian, was for various reasons delighted with the idea of a film about the case, the Ahankhah family took much more convincing; their gullibility had been exposed and they did not relish the idea of the affair's becoming more widely known. However, Kiarostami managed to persuade all parties and even succeeded in obtaining permission from the judicial authorities to film the trial. The well-disposed judge in charge of the case turned out to be a great cinema fan who particularly liked Makhmalbaf's films;[2] he agreed to the proposal after consulting his superiors and even saw fit to delay the start of the hearing by a few days, so that all the relevant parties could be present to make the film crew's work easier.[3] Kiarostami filmed the session using two 16mm cameras – which obviously accounts for the different photographic quality of this sequence in the final cut – without knowing whether the film would turn out to be a viable project. At the beginning of *Homework*, Kiarostami made the ironic point that he could not tell whether it would be a documentary until it was finished; in this case, he did not even know for certain (and this time there was no irony involved) whether the rushed images he was shooting could eventually be used to hammer out a film. For five weeks, Kiarostami improvised as he went along, slowly constructing

the film, *Close-Up*, from that tremendous (although somewhat random) first day's shooting. 'This is a film that made itself,' the director later declared, 'which came about completely naturally [...] I shot the film during the day and made notes at night. There wasn't much time to think, and when it was finished, I watched the film like any other spectator, because it was new even to me. I think it's something completely different from anything I've done before.'[4]

Quite so. '*Close-Up* is undoubtedly a different proposition altogether from the rest of Kiarostami's films. It has no links or particular relationship with any other of his works, somewhat like a star, which, in the midst of a crowded constellation, shines with its own bright light.'[5] Marco Della Grassa's enthusiastic appraisal, shared by many critics and specialists in Kiarostami's work, needs a little clarification vis-à-vis placing the film in the context of the rest of Kiarostami's work, but of course it properly and appropriately highlights the singularity of *Close-Up*, and helps to explain why it has always been a favourite of the director's.[6] However, this preference can be understood in its proper terms only by appreciating the deep-seated reasons for Kiarostami's fascination with the 'Sabzian case' and the close, though difficult relationship that he came to establish with its protagonist.

When Kiarostami met him in the Ghasr prison in Tehran, Hossein Sabzian was an unemployed print worker, about 35, a member of the large Turkish-speaking minority in Iran (just over a fifth of the population), who had got divorced some years previously and maintained little contact with his very young son. A great film fan, he particularly admired the work of Mohsen Makhmalbaf, a director from a working-class background like himself who during his career had already become known for his unconditional support for the *mostazafin* (dispossessed, oppressed people).[7] This explains why, when, owing to a chance meeting – the encounter with Mrs Ahankhah on a bus when she was reading the script of one of the director's most popular films, *The Cyclist* (*Baysikelran*, 1989) – Sabzian started to pass himself off as Makhmalbaf. He had no kind of preconceived plan, and was not letting himself be carried away by the conventional glamour of

cinema as such, but by a kind of profound identification with the director. 'Tell him that his last film is my own life' was the message he asked Kiarostami to relay to Makhmalbaf, as an expression of his admiration and a vague justification for his behaviour. Once he felt at home in the character of Makhmalbaf, respected by each and every one of the Ahankhahs – a comfortably well-off family who nevertheless had their own problems at this difficult time – Sabzian decided to continue the game, promising to shoot part of his next film, supposedly entitled *The House of the Spider* (*Khane-ye ankabut*),[8] with their cooperation and in their own home.

During Sabzian's relationship with the Ahankhah family, before his impersonation was discovered, he once borrowed 1,900 *toman* from them to take a taxi and buy a small present for his son:[9] this would constitute the main charge against him, as an unmistakable indication of his intention to swindle the trusting family. Sabzian never for a moment denied the facts themselves, but he did reject the interpretation they were given. He never questioned his guilt according to the current law, but skilfully deflected the legal issue onto moral ground.[10] Seemingly ashamed and repentant, he claimed that, although his behaviour might have given grounds – technically – to suspect a fraud, he never had such an intention and he was 'guilty' only of failing to repay the loan. Sabzian was thus possessed, like so many other Kiarostami characters, by an overwhelming desire, the passion for cinema in his case, which led him to transgress against the rules of society. A complete film buff, it was Sabzian himself who moreover drew the specific comparison between himself and the protagonist of *The Traveller* during the trial: 'In a way, I am like the boy in the film, who pretends to take photographs to get the money he needs to go to Tehran and see the match. Then he falls asleep and misses it all, which is what I think has happened to me. From the legal point of view, I know that my behaviour can't be justified, but I also think that my love for art should be taken into account.' With this speech, Sabzian fully deserves the right to a prominent place in the 'hall of fame' of Kiarostami characters, according to Marco Della Nave: 'He is, indeed, none other than a kind of grown-up Ghassem, still not cured – for there is no remedy

for this sort of disease – of his uncontrollable *raptus* of desire.'[11] No wonder that Kiarostami willingly accepted the comparison.[12]

Close-Up not only speaks to us of the human need for dreams and the cinema's enormous power of fascination; the film also introduces a damaged character, who pretends to be someone else in order to regain his own self-respect. Kiarostami is very clear on this point. 'The main issue raised by the film is the need that people feel, whatever their material circumstances, for respect and social recognition [...] Ultimately, what the film is dealing with is the difference between the "ideal self" and the "real self"; the greater the difference, the more unbalanced the person.'[13] To want to be someone else – a feeling that the film-maker confesses to knowing well, which undoubtedly justifies speaking of autobiographical elements in the film[14] – has little or nothing to do with playing a game, in this context. Sabzian is a weak and pathetic character who tries to escape the frustrations of his life by making an unusual bid for integration into a society that excludes him. That is why his question (his plea, really) to Kiarostami when the director visits him in prison is simply: 'Could you make a film about my suffering?' That is also why it is completely incomprehensible to describe the film, unless from lack of knowledge or frivolity, as 'the comic tale of an impostor who just wants to be a film director'.[15] Sabzian is above all a person who is suffering, to whom at a particular moment the cinema offers a temporary escape. Moreover, Sabzian's exposure and arrest intensified his feelings of frustration. Kiarostami maintains that his interest in the case was aroused above all by Sabzian's words reported in the *Sorush* article: 'Now I'm just a piece of meat and you can do whatever you like with me.'[16] *Close-Up* was therefore inspired by its director's explicit interest in this character, which went beyond any feelings of identification to include compassion. More than in any other of his films, including his early work with child protagonists, Kiarostami tries in an obvious way to make the audience feel a certain identification with Sabzian: the repeated use of close-ups of the latter during the trial sequence not only transparently justifies the film's title, but is also 'a way to get close to the character, to understand him; the

audience is thus made to take in his humanity and his suffering'.[17] Kiarostami clearly gives the accused the benefit of the doubt, even though he was already fully aware that Sabzian was a complicated individual, possibly twisted, and not necessarily reliable.[18] But the film *persona* of Sabzian is unmistakably that of a weak and broken man, a victim who inspires sympathy and fellow feeling.

Sabzian is not only the first of Kiarostami's characters who declares himself on film to be wretched; he is also the first to refer explicitly to his poverty and problems of integration within society. Questioned during the trial, his mother emphasized these circumstances and maintained – with or without justification – that her son's failure to find work was one of the factors that contributed to his divorce and restricted his personal development in every way.[19] 'The criticism of society is very important here',[20] as indeed it was more or less directly in Kiarostami's previous films, and now unfolds in new and more complex ways. In reality, the Sabzian of the film has disturbing Dostoyevskyan qualities, and in his role of impostor and 'idiot', he helps to reveal certain traits in the Ahankhah family that its members would perhaps not have wanted broadcast.[21] *Close-Up* constitutes therefore a complex game with mirrors, a film with significant exchanges of looks that speak of much more than a simple case of character impersonation. The well-off family that Sabzian deceives is also using him – the famous Makhmalbaf – to try to solve some of their own problems and to escape from the tedium of their daily lives. The film gives us no information about Mr Ahankhah (a colonel who had been retired from the service owing to the Revolution, who 'probably, for the past ten years shut away in his house, has been looking for something to give meaning to his life'),[22] but it does about his sons: Mehrdad, the youngest, is an engineer who has still not managed to find work six months after graduating, and who runs the risk of ending up, like his elder brother, working in a bread factory ... Nobody in *Close-Up* seems satisfied with who they are or what they do (the journalist wants to be 'like Oriana Fallaci', and is quite prepared to play the card of crude sensationalism to get there; the taxi driver is an ex-pilot who, for unexplained reasons, earns his

living driving the streets of Tehran ...): the problem, Kiarostami seems to be saying, is not only Sabzian's. His case works in the film as a genuine distorting mirror of the situation in Iran in 1990.

'I agree that you can film me, because you are my audience', responded Sabzian when he was asked for his permission to make *Close-Up*. Sabzian was well aware that that the role he was to play would be nothing like a role in a conventional film; his own defence was at stake, and he guessed – astutely – that it could only benefit from this proceeding. The progress of the hearing confirmed his impression. For Kiarostami did not confine himself to bringing his cameras into the courtroom and filming the proceedings in a neutral way. Instead, with the permission of the affable judge, he in fact 'directed' the trial himself according to the requirements of filming.[23] Kiarostami went even further and 'recreated' the trial once it was over. 'The hearing lasted for an hour [...] but then the judge left and we continued talking to the accused, behind closed doors, for another nine hours. So we have recreated a large part of the trial while the judge was absent, which is one of the biggest lies that I have ever allowed myself to tell. By putting in a few close-up shots of the judge at the editing stage, we give the impression that he was present the whole time, during all the arguments.'[24] In fact, Kiarostami 'lies' a good deal more than this, because he not only 'constructs' the trial in the editing room; his visit to the courts to request permission to film is also a reconstruction, despite its improvised appearance, and the same is true of his visit to Sabzian in prison, apparently filmed with a hidden camera. But what is interesting is not only that the director openly displays the film-making process, or that he exposes *his* point of view to the audience, but that in reality the whole film, in its particular construction and organization 'after the event', behaves like a legal investigation which runs parallel to the case that we have seen (or think we have seen) being tried.[25]

When, in the middle of the hearing, someone says that 'some things are more complicated than they seem', Kiarostami is undoubtedly winking at the audience, who by this time are already fairly disorientated with regard to what they are seeing. In a much more explicit and radical way than in *Where Is the Friend's House?*, the

director explodes any lineal conception of the story to create in its place a segmental structure based on a wide variety of material: 'real' images, later manipulated or not during editing; reconstructions that are made to look like documentary takes; interviews; flashbacks; strange dead time scenes; sequences filmed twice over from different perspectives, etc. The absence of exact references to times and dates means that the audience must continually reorder the scenes that they are shown on the screen, change their perspectives and question their perceptions, in an uncomfortable but productive state of uncertainty.[26] A perfect example of this is the film's first sequence, even before the credits, when the journalist, accompanied by two soldiers, takes a taxi to the Ahankhahs' house to arrest the impostor Sabzian, about whom at this stage we know nothing. For some minutes we listen to the desultory conversation between the journalist and the taxi-driver, interrupted only by brief appeals to the soldiers and short halts to ask passers-by (in typical Kiarostami fashion) for directions to the address they are looking for. Once at the house, the audience, which has no more information than this, is left outside with the taxi-driver, watching him pick a flower out of a pile of leaves and kicking a spray can down the road ... for 30 seconds!

As Gilberto Perez explains in his excellent analysis of this symbolic sequence, 'We had expected to go inside the family's home with the reporter and instead we waited outside with the driver; now we expect to ride with the driver and the policemen and the man they have arrested, the protagonist of the story, and instead we are left behind with the reporter. Our expectation each time is for the narrative to follow the character laced closer to the center, the stage where things are happening, but this narrative seems to want to stay on the margins of things, and each time it shifts away from the character who has the better access to the story. We are kept in suspension but not exactly in suspense. The point is not merely to tell us the story but to make us aware of our path to the story'.[27] The sequence is excellent and testifies to the rigorous investigation of form that, in an increasingly obvious and daring way, Kiarostami was undertaking in his films. Concerning precisely this opening sequence of *Close-Up*, he explained in a later interview: 'I was constantly hunting for

scenes in which there was "nothing happening". That nothingness I wanted to include in my film. Some places in a movie there should be nothing happening, like in *Close-Up*, where somebody kicks a can [in the street]. But I needed that. I needed that "nothing" there.'[28]

Towards the end of the film, which has, like *Where Is the Friend's House?*, an obvious symmetrical structure, Kiarostami nevertheless finally allows the audience to witness the scene from which they had been excluded in the brilliant opening sequence. In the film's penultimate sequence, we witness Sabzian's arrest from within the house; but this change in the point of view should not be taken simply as a whim or a concession to the audience. When we finally see the arrest, it is now from Sabzian's point of view, and this implies a profound change of perspective compared to the first time we saw it, when we did not know the character or his motives. The complex mirror game created by Kiarostami, so often short-sightedly seen as a device of a 'film within a film', consistently breaks away from the mannerist dimension from which these experiments with form usually suffer.[29] '*Close-Up* is not a film about cinema',[30] Kiarostami stated categorically; it is the portrait of a man who is searching, erratically but desperately, for his place in the world. It is only because his passion, the object of his desire and his source of comfort is the cinema that *Close-Up* is also about cinema.

But *Close-Up* is not in any way inspired by a reflexive or self-referential intention; its discourse is rather that of solidarity and compassion. This is why Kiarostami, in the celebrated final sequence, rewards Sabzian with an unexpected gift: the real Makhmalbaf is waiting for him when he is released from prison, to take him on his motorbike to apologize to the Ahankhah family. Kiarostami has not only played a major part in his release and ensured that in a way he fulfils his promise to the Ahankhahs, to turn them into the protagonists of a film (*Close-Up* instead of *The House of the Spider* ...); he also gives him the chance to meet his idol, Makhmalbaf. At this point Kiarostami has already abandoned the simple filming of an event and his more or less faithful reconstruction of it using the real protagonists – now, like a real god, he creates reality and makes Sabzian's dream come true. But, 'in contrast to the dramatized

reconstruction of the arrest, Makhmalbaf's meeting with Sabzian outside the prison simulates, ironically, a live report'.[31] Kiarostami makes the most of the opportunity to explore a new register; this time he pretends to use a hidden camera and sound equipment, which supposedly breaks down just as Sabzian is coming out of the prison. Using a device that had already proved effective in *Homework* and also before that in *Orderly or Disorderly?* (again we hear, off-camera, the film crew's anxious and disappointed comments about the – fictitious – breakdown of the equipment), Kiarostami no doubt wished to respect the privacy of the meeting.[32] But, as usual, things are more complicated than they seem.

Makhmalbaf takes Sabzian on the back of his motorbike to the Ahankhahs' house, with the film crew following in a mini-bus: they can't record the conversation between the two men because of the (supposed) failure of the sound equipment. Kiarostami maintains that in fact the conversation – more like a two-handed monologue, he says – was not very interesting, and therefore cutting out the sound was a good opportunity to resolve this for the purposes of the film.[33] At one point, when Kiarostami finally decides to abandon the pretence, background music starts playing for the first and only time in the film. Significantly, although this seems to have escaped the notice of critics, he uses here the same musical score composed by Kambiz Roshanravan for *The Traveller*, specifically the sequence that accompanies the end of the film when Ghassem has his bitter awakening after the football match. Kiarostami thus explicitly highlights and makes his own the connection that Sabzian made during the trial between that film and his own life. *Close-Up* ends with the following sequence outside the Ahankhahs' house, which bears all the signs of reconciliation and forgiveness; it 'melds reality and fiction, reconciles them', as Francois Niney puts it.[34] A film that is difficult to classify, *Close-Up* seems to defy the usual critical categories, and forces us to think about 'the fictive transparency of the real'.[35] This is undoubtedly one of the defining characteristics of Kiarostami's work.

'The truth was a mirror that fell to the ground and shattered. Each one picked up a piece and, seeing his own image reflected in it, thought he possessed the whole truth.' Makhmalbaf used this saying

by Rumi as a kind of moral to his splendid *A Time to Love* (*Nobat-e asheghi*, 1990), but it could also very well apply to any approach to *Close-Up*, a film that undermines absolute assumptions about truth and reality. Iranian critics have appropriately cited the precedent of *The Night it Rained* (*An shab keh barun amad*, 1967), a hilarious and irreverent short feature by Kamran Shirdel, which uses the device of a 'film within a film' to ask radical questions about the uncertain dividing line between truth and fiction, not to mention the questionable legitimacy of any so-called authority on the subject.[36] It is not clear, in fact, whether Kiarostami had seen this (strictly banned) film; there is no doubt, however, that *Close-Up*, seen in retrospect, was an important component in the Iranian cinema tradition of reflexivity, and should be recognized as the direct inspiration for the making of various subsequent films. These included in particular the two well-known productions by Makhmalbaf himself: the disappointing *Salam Cinema* (*Salam sinema*, 1995) and the magnificent *The Bread and the Vase* (*Nan va goldun*, 1996), also known as *A Moment of Innocence*, which could reasonably be considered one of the great masterpieces of post-revolutionary Iranian cinema.[37]

As usual, *Close-Up* was given a very poor reception in Iran; Kiarostami maintains (with some exaggeration, perhaps) that he can't remember reading a single good review after it was first screened.[38] There were critics who condemned the unusual structure as sterile; others denounced the film as a simple publicity caper by Kiarostami and Makhmalbaf; and naturally there were those who decided to see the whole film in political terms ... For some, *Close-Up* was a tendentious film, a deliberate attempt to discredit Makhmalbaf for his known connections with the regime's religious factions, although for others it signalled that Kiarostami, quick to make a pact with the latter, had abandoned his principles.[39] One critic, surprisingly, gilded the lily by suggesting a political interpretation of the spray can rolling down the road in the first sequence ...[40] Once again, as with *Where Is the Friend's House?*, the future of *Close-Up* was decided abroad, basically in France, where it was given an early and warm

welcome, which gave rise over time to its international reputation as a genuine cult film; it was even the subject of a beautiful and funny tribute by Nanni Moretti in his short, *The Day of the Premiere of 'Close-Up'* (*Il giorno della prima di 'Close-Up'*, 1996).

Stone Garden

Kiarostami was apparently now committed to making full-length features (his last short, *The Chorus*, was shot in 1982), and right after finishing *Close-Up*, he started work, according to his own account, on the script for a new film, *The Journey* (*Safar*). In an interview in 1990 he would only say, enigmatically, that 'it's a very personal subject, and no producer seems prepared to invest in the project. On the other hand, given that it's impossible for me to describe the storyline, the producer who ends up making this film won't know what he's investing his money and his hopes in.'[41] It is very likely that this was the starting point for a script that Kiarostami gave, in the end, to Ali Reza Raisian; the film finally appeared, with the same title, in 1995. However, it might also have been a first sketch of the story for *Taste of Cherry*, which the director says he developed over an eight-year period.[42] In any event, there is no doubt that his next film, *Life and Nothing More ...*,[43] was once again inspired by completely unforeseen events, and forced itself into the film-maker's plans. There can be no better introduction than Kiarostami's statement, which he wrote for the original press-book of the film: 'In June 1990, an earthquake of catastrophic proportions jolted northern Iran, killing tens of thousands of people and causing unbelievable damage. Immediately, I decided to make my way to the vicinity of Koker, a village where four years earlier I shot *Where Is the Friend's House?* My concern was to find out the fate of the two young actors who played in the film but I failed to locate them. However, there was so much else to see ... I was observing the efforts of people trying to rebuild their lives in spite of their material and emotional sufferings. The enthusiasm for life that I was

witnessing gradually changed my perspective. The tragedy of death and destruction grew paler and paler. Towards the end of the trip, I became less and less obsessed by the two boys. What was certain was this: more than 50,000 people had died, some of whom could have been boys of the same age as the two who acted in my film (the two boys at the end of this film may be taken as substitutes for the original pair). Therefore, I needed a stronger motivation to go on with the trip. Finally, I felt that perhaps it was more important to help the survivors who bore no recognizable faces, but were making every effort to start a new life for themselves under very difficult conditions and in the midst of an environment of natural beauty that was going on with its old ways as if nothing had happened. Such is life, it seemed to tell them, go on, seize the days ...'[44]

Kiarostami heard the news of the earthquake as he was getting ready to celebrate his 50th birthday with friends. He recognizes that the experience of his improvised journey had a 'decisive' effect on his life: 'The earthquake happened inside myself.'[45] Three days later, he drove with his young son (as in the film) in the direction of the Gilan region, epicentre of the earthquake and his family's place of origin, where he had also shot *The Chorus*. But the roads were still blocked, so he could not reach the place and had to return to Tehran the same night. A few days later he made the journey again, and obtained a clearer impression of the scale of the catastrophe, although he was unable to find young Ahmad and Babak Ahmadpur. But, as in the *Qur'an* verses about the Day of Judgement, the earthquake has made the earth reveal how much it knows, and there, wandering among the ruins, is a distressed Kiarostami, the shocked witness of a stone garden:

> When the earth shall quake violently,
> And the earth shall bring forth its burdens;
> And man shall say: 'What is happening to it?'
> On that Day, it shall relate its tales;
> That its Lord has inspired it.
> On that Day, men shall emerge in clusters to see their

works.
Then whoever has done an atom's weight of good shall find it;
And whoever has done an atom's weight of evil shall find it.[46]

Life and Nothing More ... was therefore inspired by a very personal experience, and it is based on the same journey of discovery that he undertook. As in *Where Is the Friend's House?*, the story is apparently about finding a particular person, someone from whom the protagonist has been separated and whose absence obsesses him, but this is in fact only the pretext for another kind of search, which he must discover for himself, step by step ...

Kiarostami nevertheless rejected the 'emergency report' style, and went to exactly the opposite extreme from sensationalism. In fact, not a single shot was filmed during these location-finding trips; instead, everything was reconstructed after the event according to the requirements of the film. In spite of the occasional confusion over this aspect, Kiarostami has certainly never tried to hide the procedure: 'I shot one part [of the film] five months after [the earthquake] and the rest eleven months later [...] It was all a reconstruction, although it looked like a documentary.'[47] Then again, Kiarostami is quite ready to admit the obvious anachronism caused by filming at a different time of year from that (early summer) in which the earthquake struck: 'I started filming five months after the catastrophe, although the story I'm telling starts five days after it, but I wanted to put the events at a certain distance, to avoid it looking like a sensationalist [TV] report. I wanted to turn the film in the opposite direction.'[48] And on another occasion he explained: 'When I first went there I was very upset and saddened. Had I really been filming the third day after the earthquake, my camera would have been like other documentary films, capturing only death and destruction.'[49] Indeed, as many critics quite rightly pointed out when the film was first screened, *Life and Nothing More* ... not only completely avoids falling into the trap of sensationalism, it also resists any temptation

towards voyeurism, and even any concessions to sentimentality.[50] Undoubtedly, the game is played out on a different field.

The journey by the unnamed film director (Kiarostami, obviously) and his son, in search of the two boys who took part in a previous film, is full of references to *Where Is the Friend's House?*. In an overtly self-referential exercise, the director not only shows a poster of the film to several people he meets on his way, but he also gives us a brief glimpse of a boy climbing up a hill on a zig-zag path.[51] Some of the 'actors' from the other film reappear simply as local people; one in particular stands out, the old man who played the carpenter, who makes a rewarding – and plaintive – appearance. However, it is important to stress that 'Kiarostami makes familiar references to *Where Is the Friend's Home?*, but if one knows nothing about the previous film one wouldn't miss anything'.[52] *Life and Nothing More* ... is a work that is complete within itself; the references to the other film are strictly incidental, and the director is simply exploring in a playful way some of the properties of reflexivity. This also has to do with Kiarostami's growing taste for spreading misleading clues throughout his films, false trails that allow him to lead the audience into unforeseen territory, constantly making them recapitulate and reposition themselves vis-à-vis what they are watching on the screen.[53] The confused and erratic car journey that the director and his son make from Tehran to the disaster zone constitutes one of the best examples of this narrative strategy within Kiarostami's film career up to that point.

Blocked roads, huge traffic jams or just detours caused by the total absence of signs set the tone for the journey once the car is through the long tunnel that Kiarostami uses, significantly, as a dark background for the credits, followed by an eight-minute sequence – inside the car – which allows him to introduce his two main characters. The tunnel is just a tunnel, obviously, but it is also a metaphor that sets the scene for another journey of initiation. Jonathan Rosenbaum has emphasized how *Life and Nothing More* ... is characterized by the 'surprisingly' numerous point-of-view shots, both from the director's perspective and his son's;[54] but it was certainly a very coherent way of recounting a voyage of 'discovery'

(although, clearly, this was only one of many other possibilities). The journey to the disaster area, including the monumental traffic jam (again reconstructed for the purposes of the film), constitutes above all a real stock-taking of the scale of the catastrophe, inevitably effective in terms of its impact on the audience, in spite of its deliberate lack of emphasis. Yet what is really important to Kiarostami is not so much what is happening outside the car as the radical transformation experienced by its two occupants as they become aware of the scale of the tragedy and the response of the survivors.

'I don't know what crime this country has committed, to be punished by God like this', a truck driver barks at the director while they are stuck in a huge traffic jam on the road to Rudbar. The director does not reply. He probably has no answers, not to this nor to many other questions. The starting point in *Life and Nothing More* ..., explains Kiarostami, was the figure of someone 'who only knows how to look [at everything]',[55] a perpetual observer who is nevertheless incapable of deciphering the meaning of what is around him; during this journey, in close contact with his son, but also with nature and the people of the area, he will at least learn to look at life in a different way. The character of the boy, Puya, is of central importance in the film, because it is he 'who comes into contact, in a close and personal way, with the victims of the tragedy',[56] who first and best understands that it must be life, not death, the celebration of what remains and not the lament for what is no longer, that is the real key to facing up to the tragedy. As Kiarostami himself points out, Puya 'doesn't talk about the disaster, he talks about what interests him in life', and it is this greater empathy that makes him the real and more profound 'interpreter' of the situation. 'To me,' Kiarostami continues, 'the real guide on that trip was the kid, not the father, although the father has the steering wheel. In Eastern philosophy, we have this belief that you don't ever set foot in unknown territory without having a guide. The kid here was acting more rationally, and the father was not rational. The kid has accepted the instability and the illogic of the earthquake, and he is just living on.'[57] Faced with the subduing experience of death and suffering, Puya's childish focus is concentrated on life. And nothing more.

'All life is in the washing up of a plate', wrote Sepehri in one of the verses of his masterpiece *The Sound of Water's Footsteps* (*Seday-e pay-e ab*, 1965),[58] and Kiarostami apparently wishes to invoke the poet explicitly in one of the most beautiful and symbolic sequences of the film, when Puya gets ingenuously involved in a knotty theological argument with a woman who is calmly doing the washing up amid the ruins, despite having lost one of her daughters in the earthquake. In response to the woman's resigned comment that 'God has willed it so', Puya immediately says that God does not kill His children; it is purely and simply the earthquake that is to blame. And he adds: 'The earthquake is like a mad dog, who attacks whoever is nearest while people who are further away escape. But your daughter was lucky because she was going to start school and now she won't have to do all that homework ...' This childish logic encompasses, however, underneath its apparent naivety, a natural acceptance of the catastrophe, which leads to an understanding of it simply as a momentary discontinuity in the course of life, a parenthesis – tragic, of course – in the only reality that we can hold on to, which is life.[59] This acceptance will gradually be brought home to his father as well, an equivocal character at the start of the film, bad-tempered (he spends the journey nagging at his son), sour-looking and rather unappealing in the eyes of the audience.

Puya thus almost imperceptibly redirects the director's attention, caught amid the desolation and the ruins, towards the frenetic activity of the survivors, who are facing the pure and simple need to survive. Expressing an attitude that the film's protagonist no doubt shares, Kiarostami says: 'At first I could only see the catastrophe, not the life. But, once I was on the scene, I saw how the mountains and trees continued in their proper places, while the people tried to clear away the rubble caused by the earthquake. Their decision to bury the dead as soon as possible was in fact an unmistakable sign that life had to go on.'[60] Wherever the director and his son go – strangers in a community that is not their own, curiously enough anticipating the situation at the beginning of *The Wind Will Carry Us* – they see people who are forever carrying all kinds of things from one place to another (pieces of wood, blankets, bags

of cement, tools, butane gas bottles, toilets ...). The metaphorical element is obvious,[61] but the richness of the panorama spread before us does not end there by any means. Washing the dishes, cleaning a rug and watering the plants are some of the other tasks that the resigned villagers take up once more. Similarly, the young newlywed couple start their married life in the shadow of the disaster, but they still prefer to begin as soon as possible, before perhaps another earthquake comes along to destroy their modest plans for the future.

There is, nevertheless, one element that is particularly relevant from this perspective, and which is the favourite symbol in *Life and Nothing More* ... for the earthquake survivors' renewed vitality: the passion for football. One of the sights that most deeply affected Kiarostami during his trip to the region in the days immediately after the catastrophe was that of a man with a broken arm struggling valiantly to put up a television aerial, so that he could watch the World Cup match (Brazil-Argentina) being played at that moment in Italy.[62] The anecdote is used towards the end of the film, and is extraordinarily powerful in that precise context. When the director asks the man if he thinks it was appropriate in the circumstances to sit down and watch television, the man calmly replies, 'Actually I am in mourning myself. I've lost my sister and three nephews, but what can I do? The World Cup only comes around every four years and we're not going to miss it. Life goes on.' This reflection had been foreshadowed a few minutes earlier by the conversation in the car between Puya and a boy they have picked up on the road, who tells them how the earthquake started while they were watching the Brazil-Scotland match on television. The director says:

> 'Tell us, what happened?'
> 'Scotland scored first.'
> 'I meant the earthquake, not the match.'

Once again, the attitude of the children – here it is important to stress the instant fellowship between Puya and the other children they meet, a constant Kiarostami theme

– is shown to be more open, receptive and hopeful than that of the adults, who are obsessed with the experience of suffering.

As if more proof were needed, the image of the picture torn by a great crack in the wall of one of the damaged houses, which the director contemplates thoughtfully, serves as a last powerful symbol of the stubborn fortitude of the villagers in the face of the tragedy caused by the earthquake. As Kiarostami himself confirms, this picture – the portrait of a mild-looking man with his meal, his cup of tea and his pipe – was very popular at the time in rural areas: 'It's an emblematic image representing the ultimate dream of an Iranian peasant.'[63] That is why he immediately thought of using it in *Life and Nothing More ...*, with this precise intention in mind; he was the one who hung the picture, torn for the purpose, over the crack 'for symbolic reasons.'[64] Later he would even use the same image for the film's publicity posters, adding above the picture the eloquent caption: 'The Earth Moved, We Didn't!'

Life and Nothing More ... was, moreover, a real turning point in Kiarostami's films in terms of his attitude to nature and its increasing importance in his films. 'For years,' the director explains, 'I've been getting out of the city regularly, and it has made me happier. Looking at Nature was for me like taking a tranquillizer. Nature has an almost magical influence on me.'[65] In its own way, *Life and Nothing More ...* also seems to reflect this process of reconciliation with nature, even in the tragic context of an earthquake. Like Sepehri, Kiarostami apparently finds in nature a beauty and a comfort that act as a counterpoint to the sadness and desolation of the world of men.[66] Youssef Ishaghpour has underlined the significance of this dichotomy very well: 'The disaster caused by the earthquake, which in the eyes of a modernist should in itself have incited a rebellion against nature, is instead transformed into the promise and possibility of reconciliation.'[67] Indeed, 'along the way we see human constructions destroyed: houses, objects, vehicles flattened. Human history has seemingly been reduced to a heap of rubble, rubbish and remains that are a blot on the landscape. Human activity and endeavour are shown to be in vain when faced with a greater power, that of nature, which leaves them far behind'.[68]

As in the great tradition of Persian miniatures (there are clear similarities with certain shots in Kiarostami's films, although he has never acknowledged them as a concrete or deliberate source of inspiration[69]), 'everything [in nature] has the same marvellous splendour [...] Drama is absent and when, on occasion, violence and death make an appearance, they do so without emotion or particular meaning, only within the framework of a heavenly feeling of detachment, peace and eternity'.[70] The Persian miniature is not governed by the anthropomorphic aesthetic that characterizes the Greek and Christian traditions, and that is why the human figure is always smaller than the setting in which it is placed, in the same way as, consequently, 'human events are just simple elements in a world that transcends them'.[71] In *Life and Nothing More ...*, the film-maker not only scrutinizes the behaviour of the region's inhabitants after the earthquake in detail, but he also – in certain significant sequences – contemplates the landscape with serenity and resignation. This journey towards oneself that the protagonist is again travelling, like a good Kiarostami figure, has nature as its real setting, and this is underlined by the splendid final sequence, which uses for the first time in a Kiarostami film a device that Jonathan Rosenbaum has appropriately called 'cosmic long shots'.[72]

Although Kiarostami knew that a conventional happy ending, with the director finding the two boys, would have entirely defeated the point of the film,[73] on this occasion he nevertheless cannot resist embracing, for the first time in one of his films, a certain contained optimism; or, as Michel Cieutat wrote, 'he finally resigns himself to accepting the materialist optimism'[74] of the villagers, the real victims of the catastrophe. Openly confronted with the experience of suffering and death, Kiarostami nevertheless finds something to cling to in order to combat the shock and depression. There is the comfort afforded by the contemplation of nature itself, but we should add to this, specifically and significantly, the vista of solidarity spread out before us in the beautiful ending to the film. Warned that his modest car will have difficulty in climbing the three steep hills on the road to Koker, the director, who has left his son with the locals watching the Brazil-Argentina match,

reflects briefly and replies: 'I have to do it. I don't have another car.' Once again, the Kiarostami hero must face the obstacles in his path alone; once again, abandoning the task and failure are not part of his vocabulary. As usual, the specific objective is elusive, but in his search for it the protagonist will find something much more valuable.

The long final sequence (three minutes long, not counting nearly three more of the final credits) is presented in a wide-angle static long shot, which shows the director's car trying to climb the hill up a steep zig-zag road. As Mojdeh Famili writes, 'in the midst of this immense landscape, the little car and its driver seem about to face a difficult challenge. The traveller is determined to reach his goal, and the film puts him to the test, not with the disaster caused by the earthquake, but in the tranquillity of these hills that seem to slumber in endless sleep. But it is on this hill and through simple actions that the film puts to the test the traveller's endurance, his perseverance, his courage and even his generosity. Once again, in a Kiarostami film, a path opens up [before the protagonist], which becomes first and foremost a mirror held up to self-recognition. What matters is no longer the goal to be attained, this is not merely a physical movement from one place to another, but the trial in itself that the journey represents, together with its consequences for the man's life. The film environment where the trial takes place thus assumes a singular and perfectly recognizable appearance. In these surroundings, which harbour all the rituals associated with initiation, with the search for oneself, a whole series of symbols lend it the appearance of an allegorical land, the archetype of "Earth".'[75] The particular task initially undertaken by the protagonist has no importance now and neither, for that matter, has the specific destination towards which he is now travelling. Constructed as an open ending, the closing sequence of *Life and Nothing More ...* does in fact leave the audience not knowing whether the protagonist will ever find the two boys, or even whether he will reach Koker in his spluttering car.

But what is really at stake in the final sequence is not reaching any particular place, but a profound personal experience. We are in some way in the 'Hichestan' conjured up by Sepehri,[76] a magical place of revelation and self-knowledge, which will finally allow the

director to find some meaning in his earlier wanderings around the lands devastated by the earthquake. That is why, when the car finally succeeds in climbing the hill and we hear the opening strains of Vivaldi's *Concert for Two Horns*, the sequence unmistakably possesses 'the sense of asceticism, of a path of knowledge'.[77] However, this symbolism also has, in typical Kiarostami fashion, concrete and recognizable features and implications, because what happens in this final sequence is not simply that the car has managed to get to the top of the hill, but that during the climb its driver has finally understood something that throughout the film the spectacle of suffering has prevented him from seeing (he could not even recognize it in the 'mirror' of his companion in the adventure, his own son). The real meaning of his journey and of his presence in this place can only be that of solidarity and cooperation. The long final shot highlights this admirably.

When the director's car makes its first attempt to climb the hill, a man carrying a cylinder of Butane gas on his back – a tiny figure in the landscape – is also climbing the zig-zag path to the top. We hardly notice him, and neither does the driver, who does not seem prepared to compromise his mission by picking up this passenger (who nevertheless did him the favour of helping to push his car on one occasion). But, moments later, the car stalls and its driver rolls it back down the hill in neutral to where he started from: he has to try the manoevre all over again. This time, and although the attempt seems to be going well, he risks stopping the car halfway to pick the man up and take him to his destination. At this point the music begins to play and, over this wide-angle long shot, Kiarostami superimposes the final credits. This final sequence is highly valued by the director himself, who points out the way he deliberately made the cylinder hide the face of the man carrying it at all times, wanting to 'take the generalization of the character to extremes'.[78] The sequence not only recalls, therefore, the central image of *Where Is the Friend's House?*, but it also enables Kiarostami to invoke the same symbolism used in that film and its fundamental discourse of friendship and solidarity, as genuine keys to understanding *Life and Nothing More ...* in the same way.[79]

'The unforgettable final sequence blends the magnificent with the derisory', wrote an enthusiastic Yann Tobin when the film was first screened in France, and he went straight on to conclude that *Life and Nothing More ...* 'is a film which is decidedly more subversive than it seems'.[80] Entirely resistant to any political interpretation, the film seems to belong in a very different sphere, and on the face of it there was therefore no reason to foresee the heavy criticism that the film would nevertheless receive in Iran. Apart from the usual exceptions, *Life and Nothing More ...* was completely massacred by Iranian critics in a 'search and destroy' campaign characterized by a hostility unprecedented in the director's twenty-year career. In the *Sureh* review, for example, Farhad Golzar accused Kiarostami of trivializing the tragedy and insulting human dignity, while condemning the director's supposed sole interest in appearing in international film festivals.[81] Massud Farasati, also in the pages of *Sureh,* harped on Kiarostami's dehumanized vision of the colossal tragedy and spelled out his colleague's arguments in more detail: 'It seems to me that [Kiarostami's vision] is the 'neutral' – indeed bloodless, from-behind-the-closed-eyes, from-behind-sunglasses – vision of foreigners who have not seen the earthquake in Rudbar in a close-up, and they thank God that they were not there when it happened [...] This is the Western humanist vision that after watching a few minutes of news on television they feel a little guilty [...] Our film-maker, like all other identity-dealers, is caught and humiliated in their trap, putting for sale himself and his forsaken culture. There is no honor in this, but shame. Kiarostami has enjoyed this historical-calendar chance that this film goes to the West – and then from here is exported back to our country – at a time when the Westerners are afflicted by "The New World Order" epidemic, the politics of eliminating the borders and creating a unified Europe which itself is an attempt to confront the deep global economic crisis. This new politics demands its own culture, a culture that engages in the elimination of ethnic and national boundaries. Lack-of-identity is the new strategy of the new world order [...] But the self-lost and talentless culture-sellers will not benefit from this transaction and shall earn nothing but shame. All the prizes and praises will not

last but a short time. Art shall be victorious once again. Because life, as art, continues. But not under the new cultural order; instead via a return, and proudly so, to one's origins and roots.'[82]

Even *Film*, the most respected and professional journal in the cinema field, which was also usually positive about Kiarostami's work, had some unwonted criticisms to make. Javad Tusi objected to the use of the Vivaldi piece instead of the vast and rich repertoire of Iranian classical music that Kiarostami could easily have used for the same purpose.[83] The criticism of Shahrokh Dulku, in the same publication, breaks all records for disgraceful treatment, while nevertheless expressing some points of view that were undoubtedly shared by many: 'I cannot disregard one crucial issue and that is the moral lesson that the film-maker [i.e. Kiarostami] wants to draw, following his previous film [*Where Is the Friend's House?*], and yet, just like in the previous film, because of a weak execution, structural confusion, misconception of truth, and a convoluted vision of man and life, he reaches precisely the opposite conclusion that he wishes to reach. *Life and Nothing More* ... wants to say that the "human" life is something precious and praiseworthy, but [actually] says that the "bestial" life is dear and lustful. It intends to praise and propagate human life, but in reality it propagates the bestial life. In order to give meaning to life, Kiarostami reduces it to the level of animal instincts (eating, sleeping, sex, and defecation). As opposed to noble, conscientious, and selfless men, the people in *Life and Nothing More* ... are introduced at the end as base and mindless animals, ready to pull the dead body of the members of their family like carcasses, and spend the wedding night under a few feet of "palastik" [...] There are things in *Life and Nothing More* ... that are extremely troubling. So troubling that one cannot just pass them by ... I will just mention them in a list and leave them to the readers' judgement: a man with a touristic appearance, whitish hair and a "European" and "emotionless" look among the victims of the earthquake,[84] the presence of a Renault automobile, the French poster of the film *Where Is the Friend's House?* ... The repeated appearance of the Red Cross cars, overwhelming emphasis on the instinctual (and not intellectual) aspects of life,

and more importantly, a train of thought that looks at life not face to face and eyeball to eyeball, but from above (high on top), and with a pair of dark glasses ... This arrogant, emotionless, and calculating look inevitably represents an unreal picture of life.'[85]

Partly as a result of these prevailing and somewhat mundane circumstances, *Life and Nothing More* ... constituted a turning point in Kiarostami's film career. We should remember that the film's screening in the *Un certain regard* section at the Cannes Film Festival coincided with an intensified campaign against the liberal Minister of Culture, Mohammad Khatami, who in that same summer of 1992 was forced to resign in the wake of pressure from the most conservative factions of the Iranian regime; his replacement by a firm supporter of the latter, Ali Larijani, was immediately followed by a marked and systematic reaction in all cultural circles, naturally including that of the cinema.[86] The changes that logically ensued in all the cultural centres and organizations throughout the country also affected the Centre for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults: 'Most veterans of the Center were either directly discharged or forced to leave by creating adverse conditions for them. These were the people who were sources of honour and credit for the Center. For instance, Abbas Kiarostami who proposed several projects was respectfully dismissed in the name of retirement. This showed the fate that awaited others who were not as credible as Kiarostami.'[87] *Life and Nothing More* ... was in fact the last film that Kiarostami made for Kanun, after twenty-two long and productive years. However, as Hamid Dabashi says, summing up the meaning and the scope of the arguments stimulated by the film, 'what was certain after *Life and Nothing More* ... was that Kiarostami had touched something primordial, a raw nerve in Iranian politics, something visceral, subterranean, gut-wrenching, forbidden in Iranian culture. What was also evident was that, in post-revolutionary Iran, cinema was effectively replacing poetry, plays, short stories, and novels as the most significant cultural medium'.[88]

The film's screening at Cannes, where it was given a resounding welcome and won the honorary Rossellini Prize for Kiarostami, would nevertheless open up new horizons for the director. Possibly

influenced by this acclaim, but also believing that they recognized a more profound debt, the critics were ready to pronounce Kiarostami a remote and hitherto unsuspected rival of the Italian maestro,[89] while Kiarostami made no objection to the comparison.[90] Praise from a multitude of sources was heaped on the film, and Cannes invited him to sit on the Official Jury in 1993, playing a decisive role in raising the director's status on the festival circuit. The support of an excited Akira Kurosawa when *Where Is the Friend's House?* and *Life and Nothing More ...* were first screened in Japan would undoubtedly play a fundamental part in raising Kiarostami's international profile still higher: 'I believe the films of Iranian filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami are extraordinary. Words cannot relate my feelings. I suggest you see his films; and then you will see what I mean. Satyajit Ray passed away and I got very upset. But having watched Kiarostami's films, I thank God because now we have a very good substitute for him.'[91] Although an early project working with the producer Marin Karmitz in France did not come to anything at the time,[92] Kiarostami had finally made a grand entrance into Western film circles, and in spite of the increasing uncertainty of the Iranian scene at that time, the director could contemplate the making of his next film, *Through the Olive Trees*, with a certain equanimity.

The Wedding March

Through the Olive Trees was, then, the second film that Kiarostami made which was not produced with institutional backing. But whereas *Report* had benefited from the support of an experienced producer, Bahman Farmanara, here Kiarostami himself would also take on the production work. An early description of the film, dated April 1992, was published in the journal *Trafic* in its summer 1993 issue, and although the structure was substantially different from that of the final version, it nevertheless facilitates a useful reconstruction of the film's origins.[93] Kiarostami explains it in the following way: 'This film was written based on a scene in *Life and Nothing More ...*,

of the wedding between a man and a woman.'[94] From the moment of its conception, *Through the Olive Trees* thus clearly refers back to the director's previous film; but this does not mean that Kiarostami was particularly interested in the cinematic device of the 'film within a film'. Quite the opposite: as the aforementioned description shows, this element was completely missing from the first draft of the film. 'I didn't have the least intention as such,' Kiarostami explains, 'of making a film about the shooting of a film. Actually, I didn't *want* to do such a thing, because I'd already done something similar in *Close-Up*, and I didn't want to *repeat* myself. I just wanted to tell the story of Hossein and Tahereh, and tried to find the best way to do it. While I was preparing the project I had this idea and went along with it, while I was working on new ideas for the film'.[95]

The labyrinthine game of mirrors that constitutes *Through the Olive Trees* should not therefore cloud our basic recognition that the film is above all – for the first time in Kiarostami's career – a love story.[96] A story of a difficult and troubled love, certainly, but definitely not the usual story of cinematic ups and downs full of tension and trivial events, as required by the conventions of the typical film genre. The considerable length of time it took to make *Through the Olive Trees* enabled the director to adjust and even change as he went along many elements of varying importance and meaning.[97] Obviously, the self-referential component of the film is very evident. Not content simply to use a definitive sequence of *Life and Nothing More ...* as a starting point, it also reintroduces – in passing, at least – characters and motifs from the previous film and, in a very special moment, it finally produces on screen the two boys who were so fervently sought, although never found, by the filmmaker in the previous film. But the richness of this reflexivity does not at all obscure our previous judgement about the real nature of Kiarostami's interests in *Life and Nothing More ...* Even the return to the Gilan region razed to the ground by the terrible 1990 earthquake, already very familiar to audiences, which has given rise to much talk of a 'Koker trilogy', should be carefully reconsidered if the meaning of Kiarostami's career during this period is not to be distorted.

The 'Koker trilogy', of which the third and final part is

supposedly *Through the Olive Trees*, derives its name from the little village where Kiarostami shot *Where Is the Friend's House?*, and to which he returned only as a consequence of the earthquake. That visit inspired, as we have seen, the project of *Life and Nothing More ...*, which was then continued in a very different direction with *Through the Olive Trees*. However, apart from the unplanned coincidence of the shooting locations, it is difficult to include these three films in the same cycle or category, bearing in mind also that they were never intended as such nor designed to form a trilogy. Even in retrospect, this classification does not seem justifiable either. Kiarostami himself has clearly expressed his opinion on the subject: 'These three films are usually seen as a trilogy, but from my point of view they would be more of a trilogy if we replaced *Where Is the Friend's House?* with *Taste of Cherry*, because in those three films there is a common element, which is the celebration of life versus death.'[98] And he continues: 'There is another of my films, *Homework*, which is not part of this trilogy but which has a lot more in common with *Where Is the Friend's House?* than the other two films do.'[99] Kiarostami's *corpus* could even be organized according to different criteria to produce other possible (albeit equally questionable) trilogies: Godfrey Cheshire, for example, proposes *Close-Up*, *Life and Nothing More ...* and *Through the Olive Trees* because they 'are about the complex ways cinema interacts with life'.[100] Rather than joining in with this game, however, we should keep this convenient label in perspective; it was invented for superficial reasons that seemed appropriate at the time, without the director's blessing, and its use (and misuse) run the risk of eclipsing other perspectives of analysis that are perhaps more appropriate.

It was in fact Cheshire himself who, very astutely, first considered these films as palimpsests being constantly rewritten, rather than constituents of a formal trilogy.[101] David Oubiña developed this concept with his usual precision, providing the real keys to understanding these three films shot in Koker and the surrounding area: 'Each film documents the one before, and in turn becomes the fictional motif for the next. In this extraordinary series of palimpsests, where each film overwrites its predecessor,

Kiarostami moves constantly between the two poles of fiction and documentary: there is no clear distinction between the two registers, but rather a complex system of permutations.'[102] This is why, despite the closely woven web of connections established through the chance event of the earthquake, each one of these three films has its own individual identity, which does not depend at all on our having seen the others; this is not strictly necessary in order to engage with any one of the texts. That said, the knowledge of all three films naturally enhances the spectator's appreciation and enables us to enjoy the constant play with references to which Kiarostami evidently devotes himself so effectively.

But let us now return to the particular instance of *Through the Olive Trees*, and, after this necessary diversion to put the film in its proper context, it is worthwhile reconstructing briefly some of the details of the plot. During the shooting of *Life and Nothing More ...*, Kiarostami noticed that there was an undercurrent of tension in the relationship between the two young people chosen to play the couple who got married just after the earthquake. This was because Hossein was in real life attracted to the girl and had been courting her for some time, but with no encouragement. *Through the Olive Trees* reconstructs this love story played out during the shooting of the previous film, and from there it follows that the cinema plays an important role in the film, as a backdrop and a catalyst for the relationship. But the central theme of the film is basically the story of an impoverished boy in love with a girl who is less so: Tahereh is a high-school girl whose parents died in the earthquake, but (as the film constantly emphasizes) she owns a house, whereas Hossein is an illiterate, unemployed building worker, with no house of his own to offer her. *Through the Olive Trees* thus refers back to the basic plot of *The Experience*,[103] and here again it is an exchange of glances that inspires Hossein to pursue the girl so earnestly, to ask her to marry him, even though her grandmother has already firmly rejected such a proposal. An archetypal Kiarostami character, Hossein does not, however, give up, and he takes advantage of fleeting moments during filming to try to convince Tahereh of his love and his noble intentions.

For Kiarostami, it is just as important to declare and demonstrate

one's love as it is to feel it (he said this with some emphasis during Jean-Pierre Limosin's documentary), so it is not surprising that he feels such obvious sympathy for Hossein, one of the most appealing characters of all his films and also the one who was most cosseted by the director's camera.[104] For some considerable time Kiarostami had been insisting on the importance of the moral and psychological 'fit' of his non-actors with the characters that they were to play,[105] but this was probably never truer than in the case of Hossein Rezai, the illiterate young building worker who gives here one of the best performances that any 'actor' has ever offered up in front of his cameras. The sympathy and solidarity that the director feels for Hossein clearly influence the very construction of the film, incorporating some of his comments and opinions, but above all changing the ending of the film at the last minute, in order – as we shall see – to open a doorway for hope in his relationship with Tahereh. This is because, for Kiarostami, the story of Hossein and Tahereh was initially only the backbone of a film that would lay itself open to many other interpretations, equally important within the discourse of the film; but somehow, Hossein's own tenacity proves him worthy of a better ending.

In the original description of *Through the Olive Trees*, published before shooting was over, Kiarostami at one point gives an atypical and unexpected explanation that makes some of his basic interests in the film very explicit: 'Actually, what you have just read is a tale of social injustice, frustration, forbiddance and stifling tradition.'[106] It would be a mistake to overlook or underrate the importance of this comment, because *Through the Olive Trees* certainly displays – through the emotional ups and downs of its protagonist – a strong element of social comment. Halfway between rage and desperation, Hossein, for whom poverty represents an apparently immoveable barrier and which is the only reason that Tahereh's family will not approve the match, sees the earthquake as a heavenly sign with the power to make everyone equal on a social level, by leaving everyone suddenly homeless. Kiarostami explains his character's feelings in this way: 'Now people tell me that I've made a love story, but at first that wasn't very clear to me. Hossein finds himself in a dead-end

street, and his thoughts turn to God, a higher power who shows (it seems to Hossein) His solidarity by destroying houses ...'[107] In the crucially important sequence of his conversation in the van with Keshavarz (the actor who plays the director of the film), Hossein expounds his personal concept of social justice: the cultured should marry the illiterate, the rich should marry the poor, people with houses should marry those with none ... in order to help each other. That is why he has no answer to the director's comment – with its overtones of a capitalist logic, which completely escapes Hossein's – to the effect that there's no problem in having two houses, one to live in and the other to rent out.[108] For Hossein, certainly, the only problem is having one house, even if it has to be built from the rubble left by the earthquake, and being worthy of Tahereh's attention.

It is obvious that, for Hossein, 'Tahereh's silence imposes a complete exclusion, an impassable limbo'.[109] The conversation between Keshavarz and the women he picks up in his van has strongly emphasized this barrier a few minutes earlier. Only the eldest really participates in the conversation, while her adolescent daughter shyly hides her face, and does not even answer the director when he asks her name. At this point Hossein, off-camera, explains to stop him insisting: 'Here, strangers don't ask girls for their names.' Hossein, let us remember, ended up acting in the film because the young man first chosen to play the part stammered every time he had to talk to a girl. According to Hamid Dabashi's interpretation, Kiarostami 'puts forward a radically subversive reading of a culture of inhibition brutally institutionalized by a theocratic revolution. No young woman speaks to a young man in this film. Tahereh, in fact, epitomizes the forbidden speech, elsewhere equally present,'[110] which exasperates Hossein so much. For this reason, breaking her silence ends by being equivalent in the film's discourse not only to reciprocated love, but to breaking away from a closed and suffocating world which allows not the least variation in ancient rules whose meaning hardly anyone remembers. 'Don't listen to your grandmother, she's living in another age,' Hossein begs Tahereh in his last and desperate attempt before filming is over and he loses this wonderful opportunity to approach her. 'I want your answer,

not your grandmother's,' he adds angrily, powerless against a wall of silence whose only explanation is perhaps this profound weight of social inertia. Kiarostami at least insinuates as much in the beautiful scene where the couple's eyes meet when the two cars in which they are travelling stop next to each other; this sequence 'suggests that perhaps it is Tahereh, paradoxically, who is the more in love of the two'.[111]

In a very significant way, and this has nothing to do with the naive game of a 'film within a film' or any mannerist reflexivity, conversations between Hossein and Tahereh are possible only during the shooting of the film, between takes; it is thanks to the necessary retakes of the various shots – a pretext that Kiarostami undoubtedly delighted in using and which displays a delicate sense of humour – that the love story unfolds.[112] Hossein's beautiful and moving declaration of love thus takes place during a break in filming and continues in an uneven way each time the film crew stops work and the couple have a few minutes of privacy. But Tahereh remains silent and is reluctant to make any response, avoiding at all costs breaking the traditional rules of the game. When the end of filming is imminent, Hossein make his final attempt, and he follows her as she walks home, persevering in his declarations of love, insisting on being given an answer, constantly talking because he knows that this is his last chance. The couple have to climb – of course! – a zig-zag path up a small hill, pass a solitary tree at the top and walk down to an olive grove, where we finally witness the dénouement of the film.

Among these olive trees that give the film its title, then, takes place what is perhaps the most famous and highly praised ending of all Kiarostami's films. It was altered during the course of filming from the director's first idea, which was more pessimistic, and the ending of *Through the Olive Trees* is not exactly an open ending, nor is it even ambiguous. Kiarostami explains its construction in this way: 'At first I thought of leaving the couple to walk slowly away into the distance until they could no longer be seen. I thought that there would always be an insuperable class barrier between them and that there was therefore no reason why the girl would consent. Even less so given that her parents had said no before they died: in a country like mine the dead have a lot of power (...) [Later] I said to myself,

though, that I could leave tradition to one side and dream a little in this sequence, wishing and suggesting that she finally gives him a positive answer. If only I could intervene in a problem of social class (...) Film-making gives me this opportunity: to forget about reality sometimes, to break away from it and dream from time to time. And in my opinion, the audience has the same feelings at that moment, because they share the same desire to change reality.'[113] As he did in *Life and Nothing More...*, Kiarostami uses a European piece of classical music – a concerto by Cimarosa on this occasion – to illustrate the girl's change of heart, hardly visible given the enormous distance from which Kiarostami shoots the dénouement of his film; *Through the Olive Trees* not only closes with the triumph of the tenacious and determined Hossein, but also with what some critics have been pleased to describe as a kind of allegorical recreation of the world.

For Stéphane Bouquet, for example, '*Through the Olive Trees* reveals in the end something we have suspected for some time: Kiarostami has, rather than a desire to make a naive recording of the real world, a profound urge to play God, a relentless determination to recreate the world by unearthing a double or [even] triple meaning underlying reality.'[114] Or again, more specifically in this closing sequence, Kiarostami appears to recreate his own Garden of Eden among the olive trees (a blessed tree according to Islamic tradition[115]), and to reinvent his new Adam and Eve with a violent and subversive intrusion into a reality that he thereby rejects unreservedly.[116] 'Remember that you must only do what we tell you,' Mrs Shiva, the script, instructed Hossein at the start of filming; but he won't give up trying to reinvent himself in the face of all kinds of difficulties and class barriers, breaking the social laws of a blind and stagnant era so that he and Tahereh – who also turns out to be a rebel – can live their own lives, according to their own plans.[117] In an important new twist in the eternal Kiarostami discourse on desire and transgression, *Through the Olive Trees* transposes these, albeit in an oblique way, into the delicate area of eroticism and sexuality.[118] Of course, the film does not explicitly address these themes; the severe restrictions imposed by the Iranian censors would have made any such attempt quite impossible. And yet the erotic urge not only

clearly drives Hossein in his relentless pursuit, it is also metaphorically resolved 'in that already famous long shot at the end of the film, in which "making love" is shown by means of two black dots who come together for a second, lost in the vastness of the landscape, [a scene that] fairly borders on the imaginary and the symbolic'.[119]

Indeed, once his characters have gone past the top of the hill with the zig-zag path and the tree at the summit, Kiarostami films the rest of the sequence using a very wide long shot – another 'cosmic long shot', if we accept the term – from high up, with no movement of the camera. Hossein and Tahereh move further and further away, until they can hardly be seen; in a daring exercise in abstraction, the two little dots hypnotically draw the audience's gaze. 'The first thing we notice about this image' – says David Oubiña in his excellent analysis of the sequence – 'is that Kiarostami films the love scene as though it were a shot of armies preparing for battle: from high up, and with a long shot,'[120] but he certainly had good reasons for this. Adopting a perspective – visual and moral – that is very similar to that of the closing sequence of *Close-Up,* where the camera keeps at a discreet distance in order not to intrude on the intimacy of the meeting between Sabzian and Makhmalbaf, the conclusion of the final sequence in *Through the Olive Trees* could also very well be seen as a questioning of the ethical responsibility of the film-maker vis-à-vis the real events that he is recording.[121] Obviously, the ominous shadow of censorship has much to do with the distance from the characters maintained by Kiarostami (a point duly made by certain Iranian critics[122]); but above all with a conscious and deliberate choice to record the situation with the proper decency. Indeed, Oubiña continues, 'perhaps an extreme close-up would be an impertinent intrusion into the couple's private space. This moment of intimacy is outside the film. Kiarostami never forces the scene; he presents, with all decency, only what it is prepared to reveal.'[123]

But there is something more, and this is very relevant to the actual status of *Through the Olive Trees* as cinematic fiction. If Kiarostami tells us nothing more in that final sequence, it is because 'the film-maker does not know any more than there is to be known', and in that respect 'the long shot from high up is

not necessarily an all-encompassing view of the scene, but rather a look of uncertainty. We are involved with the characters, but at the same time inevitably on the outside. Impossible to intrude'.[124] In reality, from the moment of the first sequence – the presentation to camera made by the actor who says he is the film's director – *Through the Olive Trees* is deliberately situated in 'undecided territory'[125] halfway between fiction and documentary, what is 'real' and what is 'filmed'. The audience is made to flounder straight away among the various planes and levels through which the film moves, invited to let themselves be carried away by this tide of confusion and occasional narrative obscurity, a closely woven web that Kiarostami unmistakably delights in weaving. But suppressing the audience's participation could not be further from the director's intentions. Instead, by these means he invites us to play an active part in the story (which despite everything does exist in the film); he demands that we take up a stance with regard to what we are seeing.[126] Kiarostami 'catches the film on the verges of obscurity. In the whirlwind of superposition, duplications and rewritings, it is impossible to distinguish a single point of view, and so the subject matter of the film becomes singularly malleable, abandons conventional labels and is ready to take on new forms [...] It is impossible to take up a constant viewpoint, impossible to fix your attention'.[127] The ethos of Kiarostami's view of the world lies in this inherent and fundamental ambiguity.

In contrast to the clear narrative style of *Life and Nothing More ...*, what we find in *Through the Olive Trees* is certainly 'a film which is bounded (and at times stifled) by its reflective mechanism'.[128] The confusion between the various levels of reality and narrative is intensified by the absence of any 'punctuation marks' (the flashback to the cemetery), the numerous point-of-view shots (from inside vehicles, basically) which nearly always restrict the audience's view, and the constant use of off-camera (the whole conversation between the teacher and Mrs Shiva in the sequence that follows the credits): all this contributes to the narrative obscurity we have already discussed and which at times perhaps weighs the film down a little. But Kiarostami undoubtedly makes excellent use of those principles

of lack of definition, subtraction, uncertainty and instability proposed by David Oubiña;[129] *Through the Olive Trees* becomes a film of rare linguistic richness and genuine divine-like pathos. The story of Hossein and Tahereh is still not only a very beautiful and unusual love story within Kiarostami's film career, but also a rigorous stylistic experiment, which would shortly afterwards inspire the director to travel down new and equally daring paths of expression.

The renewed attack by Iranian critics on *Through the Olive Trees* should not at this stage come as any surprise. In the pages of *Naqd-e Sinema*, a new review published under the auspices of the Islamic Propaganda Organization, Massud Farasati's attack on Kiarostami once again criticized him for taking advantage of the tragic event of the earthquake, to shoot a film that was 'shallow, pseudo-intellectual'. The only thing it revealed was the presence of a disturbed mind behind the camera, capable of interesting nobody apart from 'those few hundred spineless, rootless, and sick pseudo-intellectuals, natives and foreigners alike, who have discovered Kiarostami and are now putting him on a pedestal'.[130] More critics joined in the broadside, without the slightest deviation from the arguments and invective which were by now customary. There were nevertheless also tributes from some unsuspected quarters, people who were hardly unconditional supporters of Kiarostami: 'The final shot of the film is one of the most spectacular in the history of Iranian cinema up to the present', wrote an enthusiastic Iraj Karimi.[131] But now, more than ever, the film's future would not be decided by the reception it was given in Iran, although this continued to be important to Kiarostami.[132] *Through the Olive Trees* was awaited with eager interest all over the world, and it would soon begin a brilliant international run following its triumphal screening at Cannes.

Although certain festivals (Rimini and Valladolid), had already in 1993 both pioneered the organization of a retrospective of Kiarostami's career, *Through the Olive Trees* was to be his real letter of introduction to the United States, where – after showing his films at the New York and Chicago festivals – he made his commercial début in February 1995 under the wing of the powerful distributor Miramax. In August of the same year, the Locarno Film Festival

dedicated to Kiarostami the most complete exhibition of all his work organized up to that date; *Cahiers du Cinéma* took advantage of the occasion to publish its wide-ranging and important dossier about the Iranian director with the expressive title of 'Kiarostami, le magnifique' on the cover.[133] Important figures from cultural circles, also with occasional connections to the film world, such as Guillermo Cabrera Infante and Peter Handke, made enthusiastic – if debatable – tributes to him.[134] That great joker – and better film-maker – Jean-Luc Godard responded to the New York Film Critics Circle's proposal for a tribute to himself, on the occasion of the centenary of cinema, with a famous and highly publicized letter listing all his worst mistakes: not having succeeded in convincing 'the Oscar people' to give an award to Kiarostami instead of to Kryzstof Kieslowski was, he said, one of the greatest sins for which he would have to atone ...[135]

Chapter Four

To Live

Forgive my sins,
forget them,
but not so much
that I forget them completely.
Abbas Kiarostami

Entr'acte

Through the Olive Trees almost had a sequel. In fact, the film was about to be made, but shortly before the start of filming, after eighteen months of preparation, Kiarostami decided to abandon the project. Perhaps he felt that he ought to give his career a change of direction or simply take on new challenges.[1] *Tahereh's Dreams*, the film that was never made, was to have retold the story of the relationship between the two protagonists of *Through the Olive Trees*, but this time from the girl's point of view. We can well imagine what attractions the project held for the director, and perhaps guess the paths the film

might have trodden. Of course, as we are dealing with Kiarostami, anything is possible, and in fact he announced in an interview at the beginning of 1995 that he had thought of new episodes in what could have become a genuine saga. The only clue he offered was this: 'For my fourth film [in the series], I have got another image of Hossein to show. I planned to start it with an earthquake taking place ten years later. Then Hossein, some ten years older, appears from the dust, takes hold of something heavy and drags it in the rubble to a corner where he tears down a well on top of it. All we can see is a pair of feet. A kid is witnessing all this, too. Having executed his murder, Hossein turns toward the camera with a grimace of worry. Then I go to visit him in the jail. He has killed Tahereh, his wife. Now I think I must wait ten years before I begin that project.'[2]

In spite of the initial decision to return to the charming characters of *Through the Olive Trees*, Kiarostami finally abandoned the project completely, and two years elapsed before he shot his next full-length feature. During that time he not only made several shorts, returning to a format that he had not cultivated for more than a decade, but he again acted as scriptwriter for other directors' films. *The Journey* (*Safar*, 1995), a long-standing personal project, thus became the second full-length feature by Ali Reza Raisian, with whom Kiarostami worked again years later on the mediocre *The Deserted Station* (*Istgah-e matruk*, 2002). *The Journey*, an intense psychological drama set in the Iraq war years when Tehran lived under the threat of enemy missiles, tells the story of the flight of a middle-aged intellectual in search of a safer place in the north of the country: on the way, however, he causes a car accident in which several people are killed. From that moment on he must come to terms with the events, which only his wife has seen, and the physical journey will turn out to mean a more profound spiritual experience. The second script that Kiarostami wrote during this period, intended for the directing début of the young Jafar Panahi (who had been his assistant on *Through the Olive Trees*), is, however, a very different proposition, and had a much wider impact.

The White Balloon (*Badkonak-e sefid*, 1995), undoubtedly the best of Kiarostami's scripts for other directors, has obvious links with

the films about resolute child heroes that are so characteristic of his early career. Panahi, whose latest short before this, *The Friend* (*Dust*, 1992) revisited the world of *Bread and Alley* and was an open tribute to the maestro – whom at that time he had not met, however – no doubt felt delighted and deeply flattered when Kiarostami agreed to prepare the script for the film based on a storyline sketched out with his friend Parviz Shahbazi, who was also to make his début as a director a few years later. Kiarostami did not exactly write a script – he does not do so even for his own films – but instead dictated ideas and suggestions for Panahi to record and later corrected and modified the various drafts that Panahi prepared. The arrangement worked splendidly and the film was a resounding success, awarded the Caméra d'Or for the best first film at the Cannes Festival, which ensured wide international distribution. The epic adventures of the girl who loses the money with which she was meant to buy the goldfish that is traditionally used to celebrate the Noruz, or Iranian New Year, and who has to use all her skill and ingenuity to get it back, became in Panahi's hands a sensitive film notable for its freshness; its instant charm nevertheless hides some deliberate and precise social comment. A good example is the way in which the film, originally entitled *Happy New Year*, ended up being called *The White Balloon* in tribute to the little Afghan refugee who sells balloons on the street and is left cruelly alone in the last shot of the film, when all the conflicts that have arisen during the film have been resolved and the various characters have gone home to their celebrations.[3]

Also in1995, Kiarostami received two invitations to participate in foreign collective film productions, his first experience in this area since the failed project of *Love and the Wall* two years earlier. *Locations*, his episode for *About Nice: the Story Continues*, a French production, which was basically a series of personal tributes to the great Jean Vigo by various leading film-makers (Catherine Breillat, Constantin Costa-Gavras, Claire Denis, Raymond Depardon, Pavel Lounguine and Raúl Ruiz, as well as Kiarostami himself), was another step forward for Kiarostami's international prestige, and it also enabled him to return in some ways to the spirit that inspired *Love and the Wall*. Indeed, whereas in that film Kiarostami wished

to pay tribute to an illustrious Iranian director in self-imposed exile, Sohrab Shahid Saless, the tribute to Vigo in *Locations* in fact turned into another – perhaps more open and heartfelt – tribute to Parviz Kimiavi. In the film Kimiavi, a kind of *alter ego* of Kiarostami, plays a director who is making a film in Nice about Jean Vigo and looking for suitable locations around the city. Although Kiarostami was not apparently very inspired by the film, his episode includes some amusing – if predictable – nods in the direction of his previous films (Kimiavi spends half the film asking for directions, for example), together with a fleeting but powerful view of the most colourful districts of the city. It was nevertheless a rather unimpressive first venture into European cinema, in light of his career up to that point.

The second invitation that Kiarostami received in this centenary year of cinema was, appropriately, to participate in the ambitious multinational co-production *Lumière and Company*, in which 39 film-makers from all over the world would each film a short episode using the Lumières' original equipment and in the same shooting conditions (fixed-camera shots, no sound or artificial lighting, maximum length 52 seconds).[4] Kiarostami immediately broke one of these rules by using sound as an integral part of the idea behind his contribution, which later came to be known as *Dinner for One* (the individual episodes had no title originally). It is undoubtedly one of the best in the film and – it is no exaggeration to say – a real little jewel of a piece, beneath its unassuming exterior.[5] The only thing we see during the whole film is a frying pan in which a man – to judge by his hands – is frying two eggs. The telephone rings but the man ignores it and continues with his task. A woman, sounding annoyed, leaves a message on the answering machine asking him to ring her back. The eggs are ready and the man takes the pan off the heat. This is all the story there is to Kiarostami's episode; its minimalist conception nevertheless hides a story of shattered love, of the end of a relationship, a theme that is not strictly new in Kiarostami's films – this was, among other things, the story of *The Report* – but which reappears here in one of the least expected corners of his film career. True to his idea of sound as an *essential* element of cinematic expression, and despite the fact that in other ways the film faithfully

reflects the spirit of those pioneering years, Kiarostami gives his piece its meaning precisely with the doleful voice of the woman – a splendid Isabelle Huppert – who leaves her disillusioned message on the answering machine of the man whom she evidently still loves. Little appreciated, perhaps because of the modest format dictated by the circumstances, this short story of frying pans and fried eggs is an immense film about love and indifference, as well as being one of the most brilliant and inspired shorts that Kiarostami ever made.

During this same period before he began filming what would be his next full-length feature, *Taste of Cherry*, Kiarostami worked with his son Bahman on a couple of small film experiments, which were undoubtedly 'trial runs' for later more important projects.[6] *The Birth of Light*, a short commissioned by the Locarno Film Festival in which Bahman Kiarostami was officially in charge of photography, simply films in a single shot the sun coming up over the summit of the mountains, in a foretaste of what would later be one of the most beautiful and symbolic sequences in *ABC Africa*.[7] *The Project*, for its part, is a short video feature – with Bahman as co-director – about the preparations for shooting *Taste of Cherry*, a kind of recorded rehearsal where Kiarostami plays the role of the protagonist in various situations; it was particularly useful to the director in supporting and documenting the all-important task of finding the right locations.[8] In any event, these two films are modest affairs which should be seen as merely marking time before the making of his next feature, *Taste of Cherry*.

Yellow Earth

Taste of Cherry, the story of a man who wants to commit suicide and searches single-mindedly for someone to bury him afterwards, is a disturbing film, which can only be seen as a radically provocative act on the part of its maker.[9] Explicitly and roundly condemned by Islamic tradition,[10] suicide was obviously not a theme that Iranian cinema could easily explore, and in fact *Nights on the Zayandeh Rud*

(*Shabha-ye Zayandeh Rud*, 1990) by Mohsen Makhmalbaf lay (and still lies) mouldering in limbo with all the other films banned by the Islamic Republic, basically for daring to raise the issue. Kiarostami has repeatedly, but not very convincingly, claimed that he had the idea for the film after happening to read a comment by E. M. Cioran: 'If it wasn't for the possibility of suicide, I would have committed suicide long ago.'[11] However, he had apparently been mulling over the project in his mind for eight years, and presumably there were, as we shall see, many personal and autobiographical elements as well.[12]

These considerations aside, the film took a long time to make, and various unexpected mishaps complicated the process. Filming began in the spring of 1996, but Kiarostami harboured serious doubts about the ending and spent all that summer and part of the autumn weighing up various possibilities. For this reason *Taste of Cherry* – still at this stage entitled *Journey to the Dawn*[13] – could not be shown at the Venice Film Festival, as its director Gillo Pontecorvo had wished and hoped. At the end of the year, before he had been able to complete filming, the director had a car accident and was unable to work for several months; and, to cap it all, part of the negative was accidentally burnt during the developing process. In the spring of 1997, Kiarostami had to shoot the lost sequences all over again and bring the film to a close with one of the solutions he had been considering, although even then his doubts about it were not completely laid to rest. Ready to be sent to Cannes, *Taste of Cherry* then encountered various obstacles posed by the Iranian authorities – not so much for censorship reasons, apparently, as for the fact that it had not complied with the condition then in force of having previously been shown at the Fajr Film Festival in Tehran. It was only after long and difficult negotiations, in which even the French Foreign Minister is rumoured to have intervened, that the film arrived at the last possible minute at La Croisette, when the possibility of its being shown had been discounted and it did not even appear in the festival catalogue, to carry off a well-deserved Golden Palm.[14]

The most surprising features of *Taste of Cherry* are above all its extreme minimalism and its great austerity. The successive meetings between the protagonist, Badii, and various people whom

he tries to persuade to bury him in exchange for a considerable sum of money, form the backbone of the film, the structure of which is moreover extraordinarily strict and calculated. His three principal conversations are thus the main building blocks of the film, and are alternated with other long and significant periods of absolute silence, deliberate pauses that give *Taste of Cherry* its slow and serious tempo, allowing the audience to reflect on what they have just heard. The detailed analysis carried out by Marco Della Grassa is proof of this particular structure:[15]

Silence	8' 14"
Dialogue	17' 35"
Silence	6' 42"
Dialogue	16' 09"
Silence	5' 46"
Dialogue	15' 08"
Silence	6' 06"
Dialogue	1' 00"
Silence	10' 24"

A film turned in on itself, with a strong meditative dimension, *Taste of Cherry* thereby avoids – following the director's usual line, which has very few exceptions – any possible emotional identification with its protagonist. Badii, played in an excellent performance by a non-professional actor (Homayun Ershadi, an architect turned antique dealer whom Kiarostami had met by chance), communicates his distress to the audience throughout the film, but the truth is that we know nothing about him and therefore cannot feel genuinely close to the character. We don't really know who he is, and even less about why he wants to kill himself or why he should want to use such a strange ritual to do so. 'I didn't want to force any interpretations on to the audience,' argues Kiarostami; 'instead I tried to make them understand that what they were seeing was just a story. That's why I never introduce the character, and I haven't talked about him or his problems: the man continues to be a permanent enigma to us. So I

haven't told his story, in order to avoid any emotional links with the audience. My character is like one of those little figures that architects put in their drawings, to show the scale of the buildings. They are just figures, not people you could have any feelings about.'[16] Laura Mulvey, for whom *Taste of Cherry* is ruled throughout by the signs of doubt and inquiry, rightly points out that, 'here Mr Badii becomes the medium for the director's questioning rather than a character within a coherent fiction dressed in the trappings of verisimilitude'.[17]

In her perceptive article about the film, Laura Mulvey also highlights one of the main features of *Taste of Cherry*: the conscious, deliberate and highly developed use of what she calls 'the uncertainty principle'. The long opening sequence, in which we see coming towards us in a car a person – at this point we do not know who he is – with dubious intentions and various groups of workers waiting at the roadside for the offer of a day's work, mischievously introduces certain sexual innuendoes (soon dismissed), but above all it places the audience in an atmosphere of uncertainty, which will moreover be maintained for some considerable time yet.[18] Once again, Marco Della Gassa has reconstructed with equal precision and relevance this trail of false clues, if not pure and simple concealing of information, in the opening sequence of *Taste of Cherry*. In this way, he reminds us, we have to wait for nearly three minutes before the protagonist says a word, 20 minutes before an exterior shot tells us what kind of car he is driving, 25 minutes before we find out that what he is trying to do is kill himself ...[19] Things do not change very much in the rest of the film, because Kiarostami chooses to make his character's motives extremely obscure, and beyond what is actually said in Badii's conversations with various people, nothing else comes to light. The audience's feeling of disorientation is increased still further when Kiarostami makes sudden leaps in the story: the character of the taxidermist, for example, who takes on immense importance in the last part of the film, appears on screen in a disconcerting jump cut and we hear his reflections before we have the least idea of who he is. The elusive ending of the film, which we shall necessarily return to later, not only denies the audience a conventional dénouement of the story they have

been following but is also the radical conclusion of this 'uncertainty principle' that has so consistently characterized *Taste of Cherry*.

Kiarostami's long-standing and frequent penchant for filming inside and from the inside of cars also reaches its apotheosis in *Taste of Cherry*, which is literally a road movie, albeit with unusual (anti-) narrative dimensions and extraordinary philosophical features.[20] A road movie where any kind of lineal progression soon disappears, as Badii drives obsessively round and round the dusty tracks on the outskirts of Tehran, sometimes making progress but, as often as not, going backwards, ending up where he was a while before, or simply meandering, losing himself on roads that lead nowhere. Kiarostami's liking for repetition here finds a new pretext for visual expression, where the remote spots that Badii passes through become an almost abstract space, a nowhere place, and therefore prone to a heavily symbolic reading.[21] The interpretation, far from being whimsical, has been validated by the director himself: 'This idea of circularity is part of the film's symbolism. Going in circles means, literally, going nowhere. To move for no purpose. For no reason. To get anywhere you have to go from one point to another. So this journey refers to the idea of motionlessness. And whatever doesn't move, doesn't grow, doesn't progress, is diseased and doomed to die.'[22] Once again in Kiarostami's work, the journey takes on spiritual and even metaphysical overtones, but now those fruitful journeys of initiation of the director's previous films no longer seem possible. Badii's journey is a journey into the void: 'Everything takes on the appearance of a ritual, as if this were a pilgrimage' against the background of 'a land of mythical dimensions where man's existential search is free to take place'.[23] Jean-Louis Leutrat has gone to the extreme of interpreting the many reflections seen in the car mirrors as proof of the vanity of things of this world, and his opinion cannot be considered inappropriate.[24] Certainly *Taste of Cherry,* more than any other film of Kiarostami's before or since, fits perfectly into the category of 'metaphysical meditation' or 'metaphysical film-making' that the philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy claims so vociferously for the director's work.[25]

But if we agree to classify *Taste of Cherry* as a philosophical

dialogue from the driver's seat,[26] it is not for the sake of making more or less appropriate comparisons, but because the film itself is *de facto* constructed around long and intense dialogues, like those of the age-old philosophical genre that it evokes. A soldier, a seminary student and a taxidermist (the construction worker does not count in this category) are the three people to whom Badii makes his proposition: 200,000 *toman* in exchange for burying him, the morning after he kills himself. The first, horrified, rejects the proposal; the second tries to convince Badii that suicide is a mortal sin, in which he can have no part; the third, who needs money for medical treatment for his son, finally accepts, but not before explaining that he himself went through a similar experience, but abandoned the attempt after reflecting on the beauties of nature and the small pleasures of life. We should note that Kiarostami's deliberate choice of these characters is very important: 'The three figures that Mr Badii meets one after the other represent "the three orders of the Indo-European world": the warrior, the priest and the common man. Or alternatively, the three ages of man: the son, the brother, the father. But they also embody the various 'ethnic groups' of Iranian society: Lur, Persian, Kurd, Afghan, Turk. A discreet way of suggesting that Mr Badii is constantly circling round and around this Iranian social world.'[27] Indeed, Kiarostami apparently wanted to display a wide variety of characters, ethnic groups and ages, as if he wished to test out Badii's proposition with all of them, or, conversely, to compare their reactions to such an unexpected and radical proposal. But it is also possible to interpret these encounters, as Marco Della Nave does, in a less realist way: 'In the final analysis, the soldier, the seminary student and the taxidermist might be no more than a projection of the questions that the protagonist is asking himself, as well as the answers he finds during his solitary cogitations. [They could be] phantoms that suddenly appear before vanishing again in the same way they came.'[28]

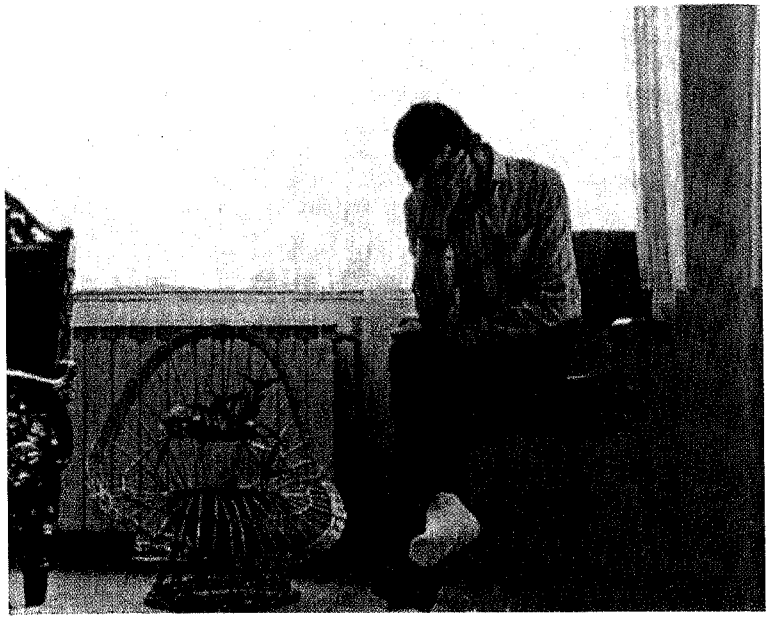
Taste of Cherry has to be seen as a reworking of many of the autobiographical elements that were present in earlier Kiarostami films; the director is very open about this: 'The film is a kind of geography of my inner life.'[29] Like several previous Kiarostami

characters, Badii seems to be 'brushed by a fleeing, lone voice',[30] apparently without family or friends to bring him some comfort, victim of a terrible isolation that the director highlights subtly and effectively. On the one hand, Kiarostami's decision never to show Badii and his interlocutors inside the car in the same shot points to a horrifying 'hermetic seal between human beings'.[31] On the other, the conversations that Badii occasionally strikes up do not really help him to communicate with others: Kiarostami no doubt intended to give this impression by the regular and unnecessary repetition of phrases and expressions. Perhaps the old taxidermist's suggestion might have been the answer: 'The world is not as you see it. Change your way of thinking and you will change the world. Be optimistic. Look at things in a more positive way.'[32] But Badii seems in no condition to follow this advice, and his suffering leads him to seek urgently for a way out of his desperation, any way whatsoever: once he has considered all the possibilities, only suicide seems to offer any guarantees. 'You don't stop appreciating life until you die', says Mr Ruhi in *Life and Nothing More ...*, and he may be right, but here Kiarostami seems to be evoking more the simple and terrible statement of one of the characters in *The Report*: 'In the end, under the ground, we are all the same.' The director's famous sensualism seems to have given way to a cruel nihilism.

Kiarostami completely rejects any psychological approach, but he does succeed masterfully in reflecting his character's moods in the landscapes he drives through. Badii's wandering journey progresses invariably through bare and desolate surroundings, where nothing grows and the earth seems to take up all the room on the screen, leaving hardly any for the sky.[33] An ochre, yellow earth – the colour of desperation and depression in Persian tradition – is ever-present, as a recurring motif that constantly suggests the idea of burial, of the burial sought by Badii, a simple minute figure, shut inside his car, crossing these lands. This, of course, has nothing in common with the imagery of the Garden of Paradise: just a barren land from which everything comes and which will put an end to everything, a substance that turns out in the end to be the only link between the characters who, like spirits, appear and disappear in the film.

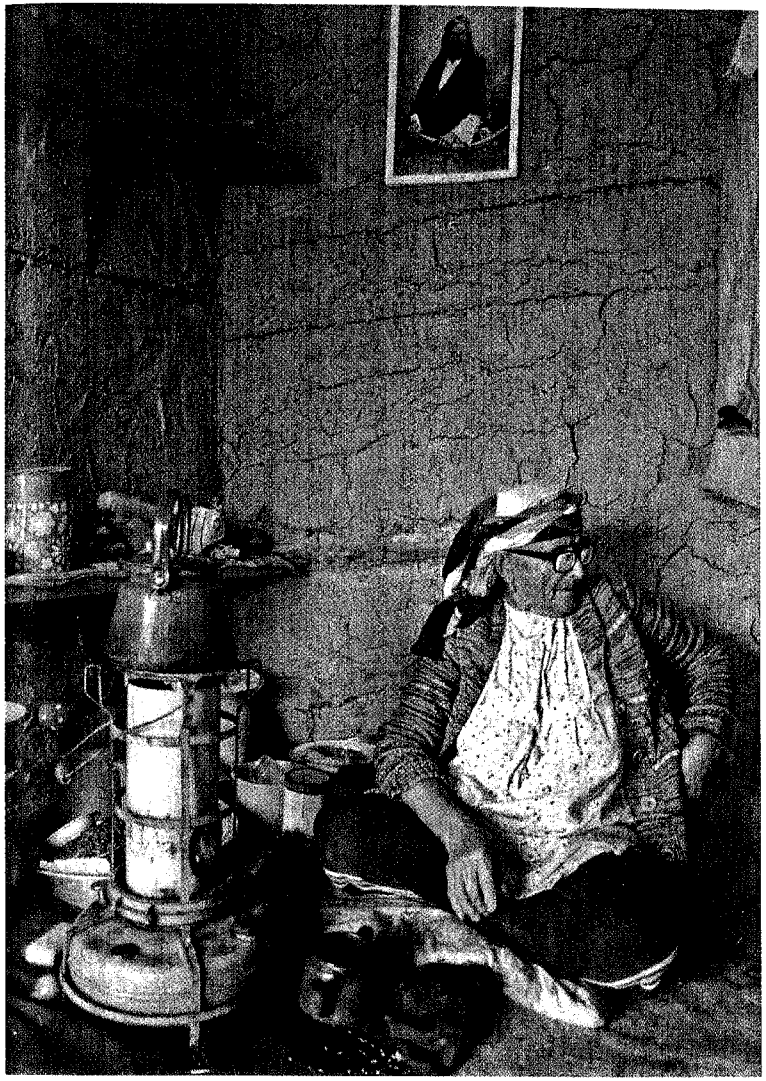
The Report, 1977

Where is the Friend's House?, 1987



Close-Up, 1990

Life and Nothing More, 1992



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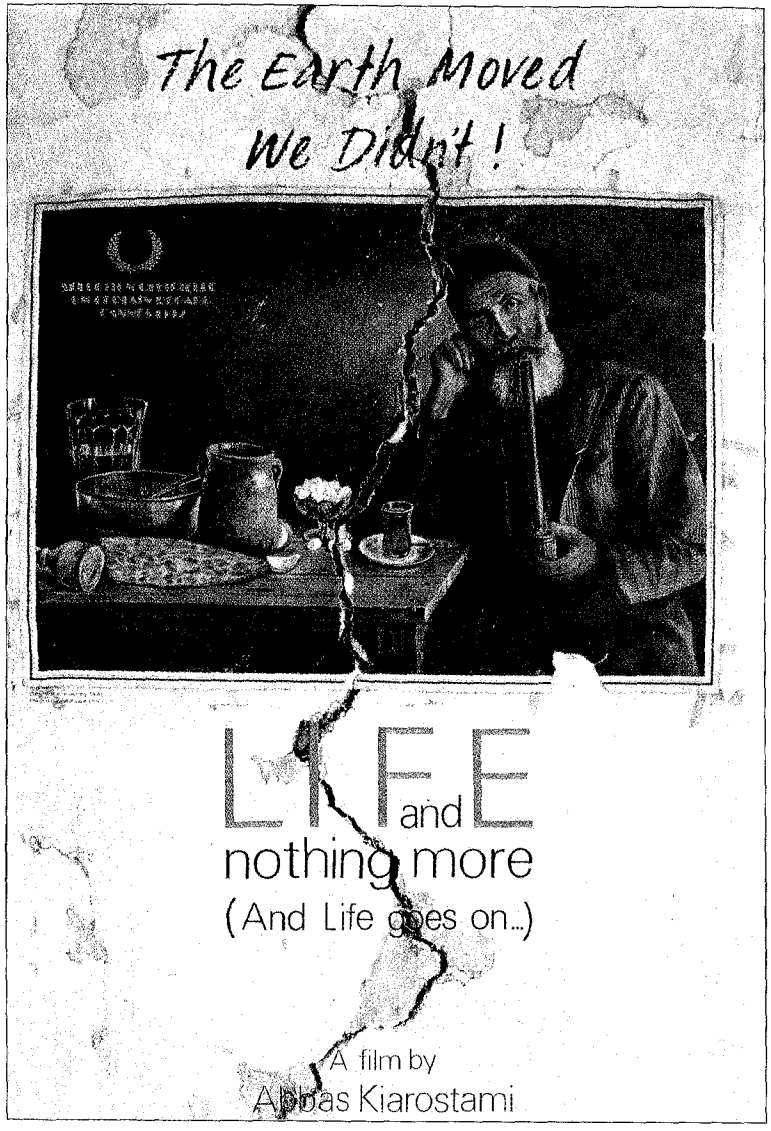
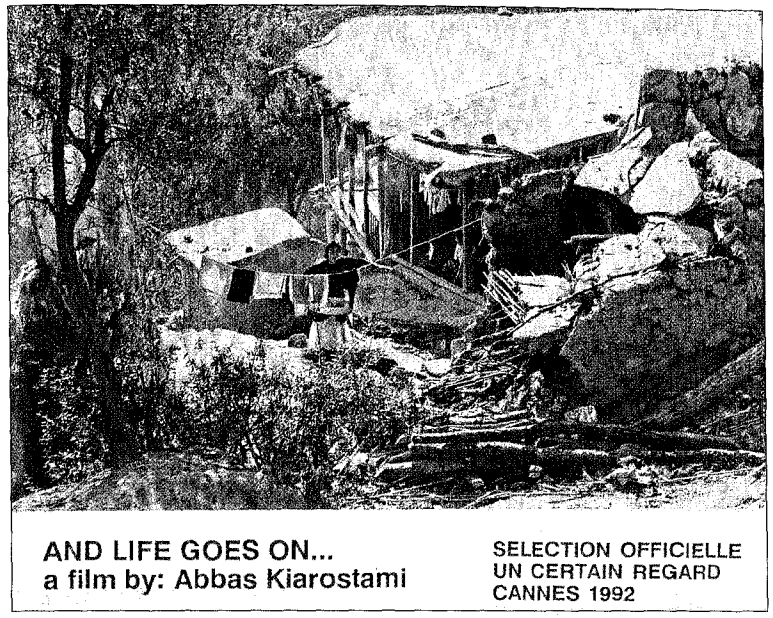


Life and Nothing More, 1992

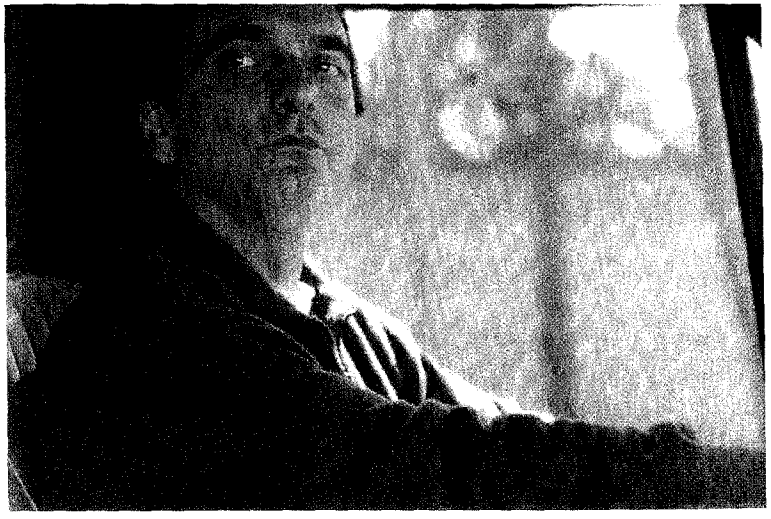


Life and Nothing More, 1992

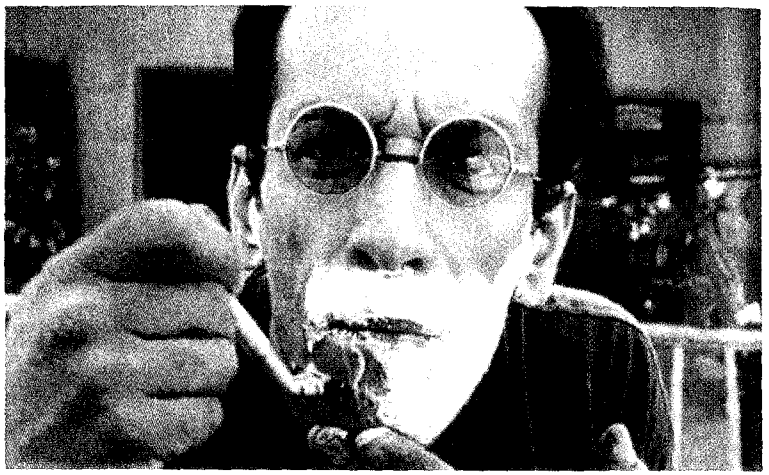
Through the Olive Trees, 1994

Through the Olive Trees, 1994

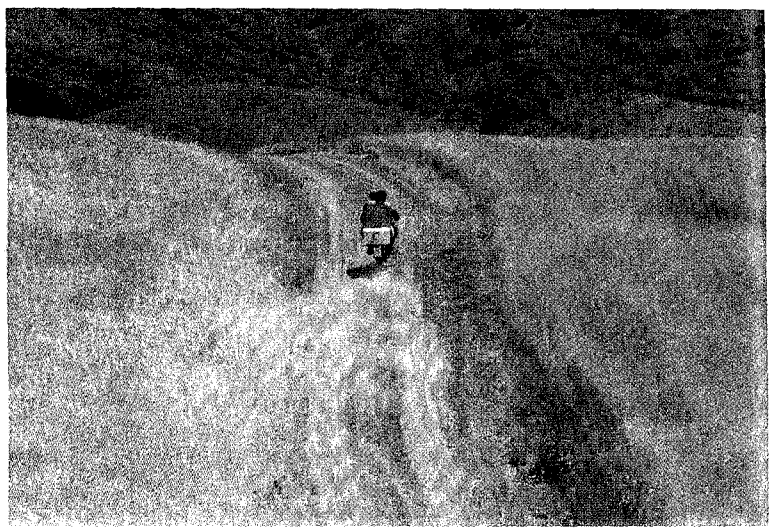
Through the Olive Trees, 1994



Taste of Cherry, 1997



The Wind Will Carry Us, 1999



The Wind Will Carry Us, 1999

This is why, despite the fact that the surroundings are almost all exteriors, *Taste of Cherry* creates a strong feeling of claustrophobia, of a complete lack of open horizons.[34] As Kiarostami explains, the location finally chosen for the film, that 'desert', as it is called by the taxidermist, a real no-man's-land despite occasional visits by strangers such as Badii, is 'the hills on the outskirts of Tehran, because the man is moving away from life (which is centred in the city); he is leaving his life at the same time as he is leaving his city [...] And in fact I wanted the landscape, not to mention the light, the relationship between light and darkness, to reflect the character's state of mind'.[35] Filmed during the autumn, 'to take advantage of the metaphorical significance of the season of dying', according to Laura Mulvey, who also highlights the importance of the landscape as a fundamental 'character' in the construction of the film,[36] all these shots accurately define a despairing state of mind, which, logically, not even the encounter with the taxidermist can alter.

Kiarostami has on many occasions refused to talk about the reasons that led him to tackle the thorny issue of suicide in *Taste of Cherry*. But, while citing the private nature of these reasons in order to avoid making any public comment on the subject, he has never denied that it has acute personal relevance, and he has occasionally referred to his father's long and painful last illness as one of the factors that most strongly influenced his position on the issue. At that time, according to his own account, he had arrived at the conclusion that perhaps religion 'did not offer the "higher wisdom" on the subject'.[37] This statement is important for various reasons, and helps us to shape a correct approach to the film, so often classified – based, it is true, on certain enigmatic statements by the director himself – as a hymn in praise of life. To begin with, and despite Kiarostami's natural and justifiable reticence, it is quite reasonable to suppose that the personal and autobiographical connotations of the film are stronger and more vivid than the director is prepared to admit. 'Why did he make *Taste of Cherry*, you ask? Maybe he wanted once to commit suicide', said his son Bahman, without a trace of irony, in answer to a question he was asked during Mahmud Behraznia's documentary *Close-Up Kiarostami* (2000). Bahman went no further

than this, certainly; but Kiarostami's confirmed habit of projecting himself into his characters and the simple fact that this is not his only exploration of the issue of suicide[38] definitely suggest that *Taste of Cherry* was the most personal of all Kiarostami's films up to that point.

Although there is no specific reference to it in the film itself, *Taste of Cherry* appears to have been markedly influenced by the poetry – and the underlying philosophy – of Omar Khayyam, a point that Kiarostami has made clear in many interviews: 'Have you read Omar Khayyam? The quatrains of this Persian poet and great scientist, written at the end of the eleventh century and the early part of the twelfth, are a constant eulogy of life in the ever-present face of death. In my film, in the same way, we could just have talked about death and left out the idea of suicide.'[39] On another occasion he added: 'As well as their intelligence and sensuality, I particularly like the simplicity of Khayyam's poems, their precision, their succinctness. Reading his poetry for me has the same impact as a slap round the face. He constantly reminds us of the presence of death and the need to live with it [...] His poems, without ceremony, make us stand right in front of death, and, without being really pessimistic, urge us to become aware of our human condition. But this is only in order to extol [the virtues of] life.'[40] Basing their opinions on these comments, which Kiarostami has persistently repeated in dozens of interviews, international critics have tended to see *Taste of Cherry* as a simple hymn in praise of life, another version (more brittle, certainly) of the sensualist and humanist stances of the films he had made immediately prior to this.[41] And yet, we might do well to adopt a more incisive and reflective approach to the film, tracking down possible fundamental breaches in its construction and discourse, which undoubtedly enrich and complicate Kiarostami's stance. As David Walsh so rightly points out, 'many critics have taken the safest reading of the film. It is complacently described as "humanist", as if humanism meant accommodation and resignation. Bagheri's story about the mulberries is interpreted by some to mean that the film simply invites audience members to open themselves to the rudimentary pleasures of life. That element is undoubtedly in the film, but if that were all, the film would be

fairly innocuous. *Taste of Cherry* is a serious and complex work. It advances certain truths and then undermines them, or suggests others just as compelling. It is true that Bagheri makes a speech praising the virtues of life and nature, a sentiment with which no-one could argue. But is that the whole story?'.[42] Certainly not, we might add. In the first place, the aforementioned interpretation of Khayyam's philosophy as the mere reiteration of Horace's *carpe diem* is far too simplistic, and Kiarostami himself knows it. In Khayyam's poetry there is an inescapable background of 'conscious desperation',[43] which is significantly and obviously present in *Taste of Cherry*. Without a doubt, Jean-Marc Lalanne is right when he says that 'the bottomless despair that corrodes the film is stronger than this epicurean eulogy'.[44] It is true, as Kiarostami says, that acceptance of life, an understanding of its fleeting nature and a better willingness to live each moment vividly alleviate this profound despair;[45] but this is ultimately a simple defence and comfort mechanism, which will never succeed in dimming that other emotion. And which, moreover, is found in exactly the same form in Khayyam's poetry.

Indeed, if we accept Sadegh Hedayat's classic interpretation, 'one of the characteristics of Khayyam's philosophy is that it is imbued with misery, sorrow, death and the void. Although he invites us to enjoy life and be happy, the word "enjoyment" seems to stick in his throat, because at the same moment, the shadow of death, the shroud, the cemetery, the void appear before mankind evoked by a thousand details and allusions, more consistently than the feast of pleasure and enjoyment, and they banish the joy of the moment [...] Khayyam's philosophy thus seems to invite us to constant pleasure and delight, but in reality, the flower, the nightingale, the glass of wine, the green fields, the enticing imagery, all this is just for show, like someone who is going to kill himself and before he dies, makes his room pretty and even luxurious. His pleasure is therefore more like sadness: let us enjoy ourselves, make the most of life and forget, so that we don't see the liquid blood of life flowing from our thousands of wounds!'.[46] This analysis is particularly relevant in the light of what *Taste of Cherry* shows us, and also seems to validate Youssef Ishaghpour's thesis about the meeting in the film's

discourse between elements from the world of Khayyam and others linked to the work of the great writer Hedayat, genuine founder of modern Iranian literature, as well as editor of Khayyam's quatrains.[47]

'It was an essential point of reference for all of Kiarostami's generation: the writer Sadegh Hedayat and his suicide put their stamp on the middle of the Iranian twentieth century and its "impossible" relationship with modernity',[48] maintains Ishaghpour, who believes that the influence of Khayyam fulfilled the same function in the work of both Hedayat and Kiarostami. In his masterpiece, *The Blind Owl*, Hedayat not only tells the anguished story of a personal breakdown as the reflection of a world that is falling apart; he also repeatedly refers to a quatrain inspired by Khayyam.[49] As for Badii, in *Taste of Cherry* he might well have murmured, like the protagonist of Hedayat's novel: 'I had the dreadful sensation that I was not really alive or wholly dead. I was a living corpse, unrelated to the world of living people and at the same time deprived of the oblivion of peace and death.'[50] Over and above its personal connotations, the film is therefore part of a world that is very familiar from Iranian literature, where the shadow of death opens up wide-ranging philosophical considerations and perhaps shows us the true nature of Kiarostami's concerns in some of his previous films. To use Ishaghpour's words once more: 'Yes, death exists even in Arcadia, and suddenly, the green countryside, the land of nature and childhood, the community and its angelic innocence, that down-to-earth simplicity where "life goes on" in spite of disaster, is replaced in *Taste of Cherry* by the obsession with death and the anguish of suicide.'[51] This is why *Taste of Cherry* above all begins a new cycle in Kiarostami's career, one that is indelibly marked by the spectre of death and where the vague sensualism of old survives only – in line with the best traditions of classic Persian poetry – as a forced and arbitrary source of comfort.

Taste of Cherry thus for the first time in a Kiarostami film presents the issue of death on a personal and individual level, as an inner experience and not a collective tragedy.[52] Imbued with a deep and fatalist bitterness and an apparently insuperable feeling of despair, the film also incorporates a somewhat unexpected element, which nevertheless adds a new dimension to its discourse: namely,

the ominous shadow of guilt and remorse that seems to hang over the obscure never-to-be-revealed motives behind Badii's desire to commit suicide. 'Why does the man want to kill himself?' asks Godfrey Cheshire, like many others; he goes on to suggest: 'The only hint of a reason in the dialogue is a cryptic comment from Badii about his propensity for hurting other people. This fear [...] connects back to the autocritiques of those earlier features, and thus to Kiarostami's view of his own life.'[53] Cheshire is basically referring here to the character of Firuzkui in *The Report*, but it might also be appropriate to mention the director in *Life and Nothing More ...* in this category, and of course Behzad in Kiarostami's next full-length feature, *The Wind Will Carry Us*. Guilt and suffering seem to be opposite sides of the same coin with Kiarostami, who significantly included a beautiful poem by the great modern poet Ahmad Shamlu in his original draft for *Love and the Wall* – an interesting variation on some of these themes – which can appropriately be quoted here:

> I became a piece of fruit on a branch
> I became a broken stone in the palm of a child's hand
> If only some magical miracle
> Would protect me from my own harm
> For I am my own enemy[54]

Kiarostami's systematic refusal to talk about the reasons for Badii's planned suicide, during the film or in the countless interviews he gave afterwards, has not discouraged some critics from trying to explore various possibilities. For Jean-Louis Leutrat, for example, 'soldiers and the war are ever-present in the film and, given that no other reason is provided for Badii's self-destructive impulse, the spectator looking for an explanation might intuitively establish a vague cause-and-effect relationship'.[55] But most of the guesswork – perhaps with better foundation – points in another direction. David Walsh suggests the possibility that in Badii's case, like that of the old taxidermist 30 years before, a story which is given some importance in the film, there might also be a broken or unhappy relationship

behind his despair and, more specifically, his decision to take his own life.[56] In the light of Azam Firuzkui's suicide attempt in *The Report*, as a way of escaping from the hell of her marital life, or the importance given in the *Lumière and Company* episode to the pain of a broken relationship, this suggestion is not implausible. In any event, in this regard it is worth considering Kiarostami's response when asked why there is no significant female character in *Taste of Cherry*: 'I thought that the woman would in any case be present in an indirect way, in the background of the film and in the minds of the audience. It seems to me that this kind of thing [suicidal thoughts] suggests that a problem in a relationship might be the cause. I thought that the woman's absence [in the actual film] would be a way to give her more significance and relevance than a fleeting glimpse would have done [...] Because the relationship between a couple is probably the most serious thing in our lives. Perhaps not the most important, but definitely the most serious.'[57] In the end, though, Badii's motives are not very important, because *Taste of Cherry*, as we have seen, completely resists any superficial psychological analysis and instead opens up other areas of discourse – philosophical, theological, political – and it is on these that we should really focus our analysis.

Taste of Cherry was obviously destined from the outset to be an uncomfortable film, merely because of its allusion to suicide, and Kiarostami himself admits that he included the character of the seminary student in order to pre-empt the predictable objections of the religious authorities by representing them in the film itself.[58] In his usual way, he also cleverly scattered a number of false clues – not at all innocent, in this case – that might suggest that Badii does not kill himself in the end: at one point he refuses to eat eggs because they disagree with him, at another he takes his temperature and carefully turns off all the lights in the house before leaving to kill himself... However, the director's position is fairly clear throughout the film, and these winks at the audience should simply be seen as 'details which express a confusion between the pull of life and the pull of death'[59] that naturally co-exist in the character's mind. Regardless of how the ending of the film is interpreted and what we might think happens to Badii when it is over, the conversation with

the seminary student is quite explicit with respect to Kiarostami's attitude to the truths of religion. 'You can understand me, you can pity me, but you can't feel my pain,' Badii fires brusquely at him. And, after listening impatiently as the young man prepares to embark on his theological arguments, once again he interrupts with: 'That's fine, but I've already told you I don't need a sermon. If I wanted one, I'd go to someone with more experience, who'd at least finished his studies. The only thing I need from you right now is a pair of hands.' Kiarostami thus continues his relentless progress in the same direction that was originally signposted, and he questions the value of any ultimate source of authority.

'The man of religion is the embodiment of a certain discourse and philosophy,' says Kiarostami, 'that imposes *a priori* the boundaries between Good and Evil. With this character I wanted to show, beyond religious dogmatism as such, all those social conventions that are imposed on us with no real justification.'[60] *Taste of Cherry* therefore tackles a controversial issue, doubtless much discussed in the vehement debates that were taking place within Iranian society at the time, and opts definitively to reject any external code of authority. The film's astonishing radicalism lies in the way it addresses this issue in terms of that basic decision to kill oneself, which Kiarostami presents as a fundamental freedom. 'The decision to die is the only prerogative left to man in the face of God or society's norms [...] This fundamental right to die gives rise to many other forms of freedom, achieved one by one.'[61] This is why *Taste of Cherry* completely transcends its quality of a film *about* suicide, and becomes a profound philosophical reflection, as well as a radically political film in the context of modern Iran. Undoubtedly the 'Islamically incorrect' treatment of the issue of suicide has in general overshadowed these other analytical perspectives,[62] but they must be examined in order to reach a thorough understanding of the meaning of *Taste of Cherry*, not only within Kiarostami's work but also within Iranian society at the end of the 1990s.

Although *Taste of Cherry* works on a fairly abstract level throughout, it is also very noticeable that Kiarostami intentionally sprinkles his discourse with very specific topical references. Apart

from Badii, the suicide case and the only character who apparently enjoys a comfortable standard of living, all the other characters in the film come from less favoured, if not downright deprived ranks of Iranian society. Furthermore, Kiarostami places obvious emphasis on 'characters who come from peoples that are geographically or culturally or politically marginalized (e.g. Turks, Afghans)' and also makes 'recurrent mentions of contemporary wars (Iran-Iraq, Afghanistan)',[63] as if he did not want the audience to see his sordid philosophical fable completely out of context with the times. The absurd argument between Badii and the construction site security guard, in that desert-like and almost hallucinatory landscape that we have already described, about which war was more tragic and cruel – the Iranians' war with Iraq or the Afghans' with the Soviets – has surreal overtones, but it still refers to very topical events. In fact, 'the encounter with the Other gives Kiarostami the opportunity to establish an important political discourse', which seems to conjure up at its centre the vision of a multi-ethnic society in which the values of solidarity and respect for one's neighbour are more important than any others.[64] Obsessed with the idea of suicide, unable therefore to look at the world in a different way as the old taxidermist tells him to do, Badii – unlike the protagonist of *Life and Nothing More ...* – is incapable of discovering this solidarity, not even when he falls into a ditch and a group of workers immediately come to his rescue. Badii leaves without thanking them, without even speaking to them, but Kiarostami no doubt hopes that his audience knows better than his short-sighted character ...

In their important analysis of the film, Farhad Khosrokhavar and Olivier Roy have brilliantly revealed some of the keys to an understanding of *Taste of Cherry* in radically political terms. They start, however, by stating unequivocally that: 'Kiarostami's film is not political, if by political we mean the condemnation or support for the Islamic regime in Iran. To all appearances, it is even completely apolitical [...] But the film scorns the ideals held up by the Islamic powers',[65] not only specifically through the argument with the seminary student. Indeed, the only mission, the only project that seems to have any meaning for Badii is precisely that

rite of death, which comes to take the place of the other possibly more constructive projects that he might have had in life: 'Now it is the individual himself who manages that absurdity and no other reality, not the Islamic state, not society, not the family, nor his friends can prevent him taking charge of it. Death becomes a personal destiny where the person cannot find fulfilment in life [...] In other words, each one of us is the best judge where religious matters are concerned, and does not delegate his decisions on such matters to anyone; this contravenes the creed of the Islamic powers. In this way, and in many others, the film provides an example of this post-Islamic society ruled by an Islamic power which it does not dispute, but whose values it does not adopt in the least [...] We find ourselves in a post-revolutionary society that no longer believes in revolution; on the contrary, everyone lives his own life as a destiny which only death can control. The film's protagonist gives himself the same privilege.'[66] Khosrokhavar and Roy even go so far as to see in Badii's action the complete opposite of the self-sacrifice of the *bassiji* (or volunteers) in the war with Iraq, mostly young men from the most underprivileged backgrounds 'for whom death was the only way of proving their existence'.[67] Badii's death, on the contrary, would mark the end of Utopia and its replacement with a dull and monotonous existence in which the individual is incapable of finding any meaning. 'The revolution, political Islam, the movements of the 1980s, all that has ceased to exist,' conclude Khosrokhavar and Roy; 'what is left is only the sick joke of a life which is boring and condemned to absurdity, while the individual has become sovereign over its unmaking, with no heroism or "pathos" involved.'[68]

However, David Walsh is quite right to maintain that 'this is a film that any existing regime would find disturbing',[69] owing, naturally, to its attitude to reality and the criteria of authority that supposedly govern our lives within it. But Kiarostami not only avoids any kind of overt labels or theses; he also decides to give *Taste of Cherry* an undefined and ambiguous ending. Not merely content with preventing us throughout the film from knowing why Badii wants to kill himself, the director ends up by denying us a clear confirmation of whether or not his plan is successful, in other

words, the manifestation of his death. The controversial ending of the film continues even now to divide critics and audiences, exactly as it did when it was first screened. Going at dead of night to the place where he has chosen to kill himself, Badii climbs into the grave and lies there on his back for a few moments, looking at the sky, before the screen goes completely black and stays that way for a long minute.[70] For some critics, Badii's death is beyond all doubt, despite this deliberate vagueness on Kiarostami's part;[71] others, in contrast, avoid committing themselves and merely underline the way in which the rich ambiguity of the ending in fact allows each spectator to interpret the outcome of the film in his own way.[72] The director himself, while conceding that the most probable ending is that Badii dies, insists that this is not really the most important thing, because the course of nature will continue – with or without him – and that is why he added the finishing touch of a kind of video postscript, no less controversial.[73]

Although there have also been those who have seen this elusive ending of *Taste of Cherry* simply as a ruse to foil the implacable Iranian censors,[74] in fact there are many indications to suggest that Badii did actually succeed in killing himself. 'For me,' explains Kiarostami, 'the film ends in black night [...] What I wanted to do was to register the awareness of death, the idea of death, which is only acceptable in a film [...] That is why I left the screen black for a minute and a half. My colleagues told me this was too long, and audiences would walk out. But this shot in total darkness needed to be prolonged so that audiences would be confronted with this void, which for me refers to the symbolism of death. [They have] To look at the screen and see nothing.'[75] The physical aspect of the sequence is, however, clearly emphasized by the soundtrack, which, as Daniel Fischer points out, disallows a purely metaphorical interpretation of the darkness and serves to remind us 'that we are still in the hole'.[76] Moreover, the quatrain by Khayyam that supposedly inspired Kiarostami during the shooting of this sequence again displays that existential pessimism that the director recognizes beneath the surface sensualism of the poet:

> The cloud came and wept on the greenness
> Oh rose-hued wine, there is no living without you;
> This green is our pleasure-ground today,
> But whose pleasure-ground will be the green springing from our dust?[77]

Notwithstanding the above, the excessive interpretation of the sequence mainly in terms of cinematic references has distorted its meaning to a certain extent and has above all clouded the possible relationship between it and the film's epilogue. Thus many critics have highlighted the parallels between the shot of Badii lying in the grave and that of the protagonist of Dreyer's *Vampyr* gazing at the sky from his coffin,[78] or even between the image of the cloud floating over the moon and the famous identical shot used by Buñuel in *Un chien andalou*.[79] Although these comparisons are certainly valid and appropriate, the film expert's memory is in this case a highly redundant tool, because without a doubt the decisive nocturnal sequence that ends Badii's story abounds in rich religious connotations, which, by contrast, very few critics have noticed. And yet it is only from this perspective that we can interpret the disconcerting (for many) video epilogue, which shows Kiarostami and his crew during a break in filming, as an integral part of the organic whole.

On various occasions, Kiarostami has explained – not always in the same way or with the same reasoning – why he chose to include this controversial video epilogue after many long months of deliberation about the best way to end the film.[80] In general, the director has stressed his desire to destroy any possible emotional identification that might have arisen between the audience and his character, by demonstrating all of a sudden the artificial and fictitious nature of what has been shown on the screen: 'I wanted to remind the spectators that this was really a film and that they shouldn't think about it as a reality. They should not become involved emotionally. This is much like some of our grandmothers who told us stories, some with happy endings and some with sad ones. But at the end they repeat a Persian saying which goes like this:

"but after all, it is just a tale!"'[81] In other interviews, Kiarostami has nevertheless pointed out additional elements: 'This little postscript is like an amateur film, a family film, shot using a video camera and in private, as though they were filming life and the resurrection. It is a documental addition to the film itself. I didn't want it to be an integral part of the film: the use of video and the fact that there is no direction at all give it a documentary feel.'[82] Nothing could be further, however, from the fashion of a 'film within a film' or from a predictable *mise en abyme*, as the director himself hastens to make clear: the ending of *Taste of Cherry*, he adds enigmatically, 'hides a greater truth'.[83]

The film's postscript, its setting now the full green of spring in that same landscape that was so arid and barren while Badii was driving through it in the film, has been commonly interpreted as a note of hope and cheerfulness in the wake of the previous sombre sequence, even if opinions about its appropriateness have varied.[84] However, very few have understood that 'the controversial (to critics) ending of *Taste of Cherry* is not some separate addition to the film proper or a sort of a filmic afterthought but rather an organic outgrowth of an experiential progression throughout the film'.[85] Michael Price, the strongest proponent of this theory, has convincingly argued the need to consider this postscript as an element that is in no way dispensable within the construction and discourse of the film. As Kiarostami himself has recognized on occasion, the ending of *Taste of Cherry* comes to represent a beatific vision characterized by a sense of harmony and happiness that have been completely lacking throughout the film: 'This epilogue' – says the director – 'is a representation of paradise. A paradise where the soldiers, instead of weapons, hold flowers in their hands.'[86] This interpretation has been adopted by some Iranian critics and scholars, who see various elements in the video epilogue that would seriously justify this allegorical interpretation, and place this atypical happy ending in the realm of a utopian renewal of life.[87]

The ending of *Taste of Cherry* summons up, in reality, many elements inspired by religion, which Kiarostami no doubt uses for a different vocation, but which in any case give these sequences

some extraordinarily rich connotations. The storm that breaks just as Badii is getting into the grave and the specific image of the cloud crossing the moon refer to the imagery of the Day of Judgement in Islamic tradition:

> The Day heaven shall be parted by clouds and the angels
> are sent down in throngs
> The true dominion on that Day shall be the
> Compassionate's, and it shall be a strenous
> Day for the unbelievers.[88]

But the Day of Judgement is also repeatedly described in the *Qur'an* as the day when the faithful and sinners will be raised with a trumpet call, to be led to paradise or hell depending on their acts on Earth:

> And on that Day we shall make them surge upon one
> another,
> And the trumpet shall be blown, and we shall gather them
> together.[89]

Once the body has been washed with rainwater, as Muslim tradition requires, the storm is over and the kingdom of light returns, it is indeed a trumpet that introduces the enigmatic epilogue of *Taste of Cherry*. This time it is not Israfil, the Angel of the Resurrection according to the Persian Islamic tradition, who sounds the trumpet, but the profound religious connotations are nevertheless unavoidable. Louis Armstrong's trumpet sounds the first notes of the classic *St James Infirmary* by Joe Primrose, a funeral elegy whose lyrics anticipate the vision of death itself while a man is keeping vigil over the body of a loved one. 'But in the funereal tradition of New Orleans jazz,' explains Price, 'the song only *begins* plaintively and soulfully, and then evolves into joy as relatives and friends shift from mourning to a celebration of the deceased's life with a party. Initially, Armstrong's version suggests

the same in the film: sadness and mourning. But then as we see the soldiers frolic and rest, we feel some sort of life connected to and coming from death, a cycle of joy emerging out of sorrow.'[90]

So Kiarostami once more uses Western music, to bring *Taste of Cherry* to a close, and he does it in such an ostentatious way that we have to wonder about his precise intention: after the complete absence of background music throughout the film, the trumpet breaks the sepulchral silence that accompanies the black screen to announce, in effect, a kind of joyful Utopia. This is moreover quite in keeping with the director's usual philosophy: 'This music, funeral music played over a dead body, interested me because of the sensuality of Louis Armstrong's trumpet-playing, particularly cheerful and optimistic in spite of everything, which expresses very well that idea of life that the film tries to convey. A piece of music that in this sense is I think very close to the poetry of Khayyam, where joy finally emerges from sorrow.'[91] The metaphor of the resurrection and paradise, brilliantly introduced by the video epilogue after the long sequence where the screen is black,[92] evokes – not accurately, but effectively – a Utopian dream, not necessarily *post mortem*, full of significant details that contrast with what little we know of Badii's life from his last few days: memories of war give way to relaxed soldiers with flowers in their hands (perhaps an echo of that time during his military service that Badii remembers as the only time of his life when he was happy), the barren and desolate earth makes way for green and spring-like hillsides crowned with a solitary tree (a modest image of the garden of paradise after his erratic wanderings through an earthly desert) and the lonely Badii perhaps finds the friend he never had (the Kiarostami who offers him a cigarette) or at least the peace and harmony that was denied him in life. Over and above the powerful and complex overtones established by the Islamic religious imagery,[93] the ending of *Taste of Cherry* tries to offer a kind of Utopian vision intended to extract, out of pessimism, suffering and the tragic experience of existence, a form of comfort, or a lesson, which can ultimately help others to redirect their lives. In Price's words, 'Kiarostami suggests something resembling a rebirth through the ending of *Taste of Cherry* [...] When

the trumpet blows, the film is nearly over – its two-hour slumber complete, now the audience has to rise and account for itself.'[94]

The Phantom of Liberty

Arriving after the deadline at Cannes, not even seen beforehand by the festival's selection committee, *Taste of Cherry* was awarded a well-deserved Golden Palm in 1997.[95] Many critics said that the film marked the highest point in Kiarostami's film career hitherto, and with that glorious reputation the film began to be shown all over the world ... except in Iraq, where the media barely reported the triumph. Instead, Catherine Deneuve's famous kiss on the cheek as she gave him the prize caused the director problems with the more conservative factions in his country and the film, which undoubtedly suffered as a result, in any event took quite some time to reach the public. When it could finally be shown to Iranian audiences, it was given a fairly chilly reception and there were even some quite virulent reactions.[96] However, *Taste of Cherry* could be shown without too much difficulty, thanks to the winds of change that were blowing through the country following Mohammad Khatami's victory in the presidential elections of the 2nd of Khordad (23rd May 1997). A new era was certainly about to dawn for Iranian cinema at this critical period in the country's history.

Khatami, who had been Minister of Culture between 1982 and 1992 (when he had been forced to resign in the wake of pressure from the more conservative factions in the government), was elected President of the Islamic Republic with a large popular vote, but also with the support of the majority of film professionals. No fewer than three communiqués were issued during the run-up to the all-important election day, the 2nd of Khordad, urging people to vote for the reformist candidate, while the director Seifollah Daad – president of the Khane-ye Sinema (House of Cinema), an active association of trade unions formed in 1989 – took on the making of Khatami's campaign propaganda film. This affinity,

far from disappearing once Khatami became President, has continued to manifest itself in constant and varied ways right up to the present day, for example the angry and forceful response by Mohsen Makhmalbaf to the imprisonment of the mayor of Tehran, Gholamhossein Karbaschi, or the election of another film-maker, Behruz Afkhami, as a member of Parliament for the progressive Participation Front in the elections of February 2000. But above all, it was the appointment of Ataollah Mohajerani – a respected and admired figure in professional cinema circles – as the new Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance and of Seifollah Daad himself as Deputy Minister for Film Affairs that gives the real measure of the obvious similarity of views between the new government and leading figures of the Iranian film-making community.

In December 1997, just four months after Khatami took up office as the President of the Republic, the conference of the Islamic Organization held in Tehran gave him the first great opportunity to progress his idea of 'dialogue between civilizations' (mainly designed to re-establish relations with the United States and, to a lesser extent, with the European Union); it was soon quashed, however, by the Leader of the Revolution, Ali Khamenei, and the ultraconservative factions of the regime. The conflict between a progressive government and a Parliament that was still dominated by the conservatives was felt in other areas, and that same month saw the breakout in the holy city of Qom of what came to be known as 'the war of the Ayatollahs', which in fact was a bitter debate about the nature of loyalty to the principles of the Islamic Revolution and its Supreme Leader. The film world also felt the effects of these early political tensions; the decision by the Minister of Culture to authorize the showing of *The Snowman* (*Adam-e barfi*, Davud Mirbagheri, 1994), a straightforward comedy based on the adventures of a man who dresses up as a woman to try to get a visa for the United States, which had been suppressed for several years by the Iranian censors, provoked an immediate boycott by numerous conservative militants who picketed cinemas. A firm response by the authorities nevertheless put an end to the conflict, although it was only the beginning of a long series of skirmishes and confrontations that are far from over.[97]

Indeed, the conservative backlash intensified after the spring of 1998 with the prosecution of the mayor of Tehran on charges of corruption, the campaign against the Home Office Minister Abdullah Nuri on the grounds of the alleged lack of public safety in the country (he was removed from office in June after a vote of no confidence in Parliament) and the start of a programme to close down many progressive publications under the most varied and inconsistent pretexts (among these was the daily paper *Salam*) in July 1999. The latter immediately gave rise to serious confrontations between students claiming the right of free expression and the police, attacks on reformist writers, the arrest of journalists with government connections, etc. – all well-known events, which nevertheless constitute the sensitive background to an extraordinary dynamism within the cinema industry. For proof we need look no further than the frequent and striking presence of Iranian films at important international festivals and on cinema screens all over the world.

One of the first policies adopted by Khatami's government vis-à-vis the cinema industry was undoubtedly the gradual relaxation of censorship. The authorization to screen *The Snowman* was not an isolated case, but in fact reflected the firm intention of the authorities to facilitate – as far as possible within existing strict guidelines – working conditions within the industry and to bring out a number of films for public exhibition that had been banned some years previously. 'We must always remember that we are not the leaders of the cinema industry, but simply its managers', declared Seifollah Daad repeatedly as a kind of guiding principle for film-makers in what was hoped would be a new era of freedom for the country.[98] Thus not only *Taste of Cherry* presumably benefited from the new tolerance, but also films such as the excellent *Dance of Dust* (*Raghs-e khak*, Abolfazl Jalili, 1992) and *The Lady* (*Banu*, Dariush Mehrjui, 1992, a singular remake of *Viridiana*) were finally screened in 1998. Despite this, other equally deserving and appropriate films remain in obscurity: for example, two other films by Yalili, *'Det' Means Girl* (*Det yani dokhtar*, 1994) and *A True Story* (*Yek dastan-e vaghei*, 1995), not to mention even older films such as *Time of Love* (*Nobat-e asheghi*) and *Nights on the Zayandeh Rud* (*Shabha-ye Zayandeh Rud*),

both made by Makhmalbaf in 1991 and still inexcusably banished to obscurity. The continual, even increasing friction between progressive and conservative factions was, moreover, reflected in the actions taken by the censors, and new films met with unforeseen difficulties: an obvious example is *The Silence* (*Sukut*, Mohsen Makhmalbaf, 1998), still not authorized for screening owing to its director's refusal to cut a short scene showing a little girl dancing. Although the industry had succeeded in overcoming the earlier much more restrictive conditions (which Jafar Panahi, the director of *The White Balloon*[99] specifically compared with McCarthyism), the situation has certainly not reverted to normal by any means.

Together with the relative liberalization of censorship, the new regime also gave significant backing to the rehabilitation of various cinema talents that had been lost for one reason or another after the Revolution. Two symbolic examples are Parviz Kimiavi and Bahman Farmanara, important pre-revolutionary figures restored to Iranian cinema with the showing of three very interesting films: *Iran is My Homeland* (*Sarey-e man ast*, 1999) by Kimiavi and *Smell of Camphor, Scent of Jasmine* (*Bu-ye kafur, atr-e yas*, 2000) and *The House on the Water* (*Kkane-ye ruj-e ab*, 2001) by Farmanara. Even a director such as Bahram Beyzai, who had been making films during the revolutionary era but was long absent from cinema screens, was finally able to get back behind the camera in the warmth of the more favourable atmosphere with *Killing Rabids* (*Sag koshi*, 2001). The rehabilitation of the great Sohrab Shahid Saless's work was particularly symbolic and is worth a separate mention. Perhaps the most important film-maker in Iran during the 1970s, living and working in Germany since the latter half of that decade (and later in the United States until his death in 1998), his work was only now given its proper value by Iranian critics, although his influence had always been apparent, from Kiarostami's own films to one of the most brilliant surprises in recent years, *One More Day* (*Yek ruz bishtar*, Babak Payami, 2000), the work of a young director trained in Canada. (Payami's later film, *The Vote is Secret* [*Ray-e makhfi*, 2001] did not, however, reflect the same inspiration.)

The energetic activity within political and cultural circles has

also been reflected in some far-reaching and significant changes in the film industry. Without going into too much detail, it is relevant to note that the output of the Iranian film industry has stabilized at between 60 and 65 films per year (comparable to the production of Spain or Germany, placing Iran in about tenth place in terms of world ranking), and despite the usual restrictions imposed on foreign films, there are not enough cinemas in Iran (300 or so) to show them all. The government has put in train various plans at this time to increase the number of cinemas, particularly outside Tehran (over 100), but these are still to take effect, even supposing they are eventually implemented. However, the lack of other forms of public entertainment, together with low ticket prices (affordable even for modest Iranian salaries), makes film-going a hugely popular pastime in Iran, which means a very healthy industry despite the frequent 'alarm calls' by industry sources on one pretext or another. Although local audiences invariably opt for commercial films with no particular refinement (comedies, melodramas and action films continue to dominate the box-office, while *Taste of Cherry* achieved an audience of only 75,000 during its commercial run), the sheer variety of production is increasingly noticeable and new operators frequently surface looking for new formulas. In another development, the recent lifting of the ban on foreign imports by individuals (until then a closely and jealously guarded state monopoly) is likely to bring further changes, the extent of which is uncertain given the traditional features of a captive market.

However, nothing better reflects the winds of change blowing through the Iranian cinema industry than the films themselves. Apart from the endless stories of children-in-search-of-something, recent productions appear to be tackling new themes and revisiting others that have barely been touched upon until now, with confidence and determination. One of the biggest box-office successes in recent years, for example, *Red* (*Ghermez*, Fereydun Jeirani, 1999), a thriller with no particular artistic merits, confronted Iranian audiences with the unusual character of a psychopath, a complete novelty (as several critics have rightly pointed out[100]) for the prudish sensibilities of the Iranian film-going public. Babak Payami's *opera prima*, *One More*

Day, a surprising and refined exercise in film minimalism, exudes an unusual world-weariness in its presentation of the anodyne and frustrated lives of its protagonists, something very rarely seen in local cinemas. Elsewhere, the traditional streak of feminism in Iranian cinema seems to be giving rise to more incisive treatments, such as are apparent (apart from the subject matter itself) in films such as *The Lady of May* (*Banu-ye ordibehesht*, Rakhshan Bani-Etemad, 1998), *Two Women* (*Do zan*, Tahmineh Milani, 1998) and *The Bride of Fire* (*Arus-e atash*, Khosro Sinai, 2000), all of which proved to be very popular with local audiences. The same can be said of a new theme, apparently much in vogue, which is the realistic portrayal of the problems of young people. *Sweet Agony* (*Masab-e shirin*, 1999) by the veteran director Ali Reza Davudnezad started off the trend, which continued with such interesting films as Rasul Sadr Ameli's diptych *The Girl with the Sneakers* (*Dokhtari ba kafsh-haye katani*, 1999), a disillusioned look at the subject based on the adventures of a girl who runs away from home after being held by the police for her relationship with a certain friend, and the equally critical *My Name is Taraneh, I'm Fifteen* (*Man Taraneh, 15 sal daram*, 2001).

The films that are the most representative of the complex dilemmas faced by Iranian cinema during the Khatami era include, first and foremost, *The Circle* (*Dayereh*, Jafar Panahi, 2000), *Under the City's Skin* (*Zir-e pust-e shahr*, Rakhshan Bani-Etemad, 2001) and *The Hidden Half* (*Ni-meh-ye penhan*, Tahmineh Milani, 2001).[101] It was, however, against this background and in this atmosphere of vigorous change that Kiarostami began work on his next film, *The Wind Will Carry Us*, the first of his full-length features that had the benefit of foreign investment, thus following a path which has been well-trodden in recent times and has been taken advantage of by directors such as Mohsen Makhmalbaf, Samira Makhmalbaf, Abolfazl Jalili and Babak Payami, among others, even giving birth to the first co-production between Iran and the United States since the Islamic Revolution: *Strangers* (*Biganegan*, Ramin Bahrani, 2000). Cautious beginnings, perhaps, with which the cinema industry can carry forward the longed-for 'dialogue between civilizations', but undoubtedly expressive of a genuine desire by

the progressive faction of the Islamic Republican authorities to establish links with foreign film-making circles. In the case of Kiarostami, in particular, all his recent films have been characterized by foreign investment and the growing, although mistaken view of the director as 'some kind of "world cinema" super-*auteur*'.[102]

Chapter Five

Through a Glass Darkly

The more I think
the less I understand
why the truth should be so bitter.
Abbas Kiarostami

Deathwatch

The Wind Will Carry Us was the first of Kiarostami's full-length features co-produced by Marin Karmitz, eight years after the abortive project of *Love and the Wall*. Given that Kiarostami tends to work to a very low budget, the great advantage of this collaboration for him was not financial, but technical (post-production) and in terms of circulation (mitigating, among other things, the possible effects of Iranian censorship).[1] The film undoubtedly deals with the same reflections about life and death that the latter film had explored so masterfully, but does so in quite a different register. *The Wind Will Carry Us* is also 'the chronicle of a death foretold', and in this sense is

basically a film about waiting, a waiting consisting of brief meetings which do not, however, overcome the loneliness of its protagonist, who, despite this, undergoes – like most of Kiarostami's characters except Badii – a profoundly life-changing experience in the remote and labyrinthine Kurdish village of Siah Dareh.

The Wind Will Carry Us is based on a short story by Mahmud Aydin, freely adapted and developed by Kiarostami: 'The original idea – a group of people [who] want to film a report about a funeral ceremony – was not mine. But the rest of the story didn't interest me, and on location, it ended up by being something completely different from the original plan. I made the film in my own way, taking into account what I saw and found at the shooting location.'[2] From the first moments of the film, indeed, we are carried back to a world that is already familiar to those who have followed Kiarostami's career with much attention. Filmed using wide-angle long shots, as in *Taste of Cherry*, a 4x4 drives through beautiful countryside while we listen to the conversation of the unknown occupants, who have apparently lost their way: the reference to the tunnel they have just gone through is an explicit reminder of Puya's question at the beginning of *Life and Nothing More …*; one of the passengers refers to that tree next to the 'garden-lane more green than God's dream', quoting a verse from the Sepehri poem that formed the background to *Where Is the Friend's House?*.[3] As Alain Bergala rightly points out, 'during the first twenty minutes of the film we get the impression that the director is complacently retracing his steps, and is giving in to the temptation to film his shots *à la* Kiarostami, but the audience quickly discovers that this is just a red herring, for we then immediately depart from all the familiar paths of previous films and discard, not without irony, this same wealth of the director's images in order to turn our attention in a different way to other areas'.[4]

Kiarostami is therefore operating here in an apparently paradoxical way, reworking his usual 'uncertainty principle' based on the accumulation and repetition of motifs and elements that are already very familiar to the audience. Charles Tesson offers these lucid reflections on the subject: '[*The Wind Will Carry Us*] takes the spectator into areas which have never before been explored

by the director, despite the fact that it often seems to be going in exactly the opposite direction [...] As the film progresses, there are more and more signs of recognition, and various motifs are continually re-used, becoming familiar through sheer repetition. The spectator feels himself to be on familiar ground, although in fact this accumulation of recognizable elements works in a deceptive way. Although the pieces of material are identical, the thread which joins them together has changed, and it is precisely this transformation, the result of the adoption of a new fictional perspective, that constitutes the profound originality of this film.'[5] This is also why Marco Dalla Gassa has quite rightly called *The Wind Will Carry Us* 'a general investigation of disorientation',[6] which leads the audience in the end to 'doubt the film itself'.[7]

'*The Wind Will Carry Us*,' continues Tesson, 'is a film which never allows the audience, deprived of a compass, to get their bearings, and this is more unsettling than any other film of Kiarostami's has ever been. Little by little the pieces of the mosaic come together, but the audience can never succeed in getting sufficient overview to be able to see the whole picture, which is entirely elusive.'[8] We are not, however, dealing with a 'difficult' or 'impenetrable' film, in the accepted sense of these terms. This is something quite different: *The Wind Will Carry Us* is based fundamentally on a 'calculated, multileveled opacity',[9] which conceals any kind of information from the audience 'to the point of perversity'.[10] Or, as Laura Mulvey maintains, 'the film is as much about what is not said and what is not shown'.[11] Kiarostami's penchant for ellipsis and exploration of the use of off-scene here plays a major role, given that the director makes systematic use of both these devices to construct his story in a highly atypical way.[12] The 'principle of subtraction' that David Oubiña had already discussed in relation to *Through the Olive Trees* is even better and more convincing when applied to this film. His analysis is once again appropriate when confronting *The Wind Will Carry Us*: 'The film is constructed around rarefaction: it is not an adding together of shots but, quite the opposite, what is left after eliminating surplus images which would have made the film a simple story without perspective [...]

The cinema is a subtraction, it is a little less than life. Something is always left out in the end.'[13] Once again, it would be a mistake to think of *The Wind Will Carry Us* as an exercise in mannerism or a simple self-referential game, even though initially appearances seem to point in that direction. Kiarostami's real and deeper concern in this film – and probably also in the rest of his work – is quite simply what Alain Bergala has called a 're-education of the gaze'.[14]

One of the most daring strategies used by Kiarostami in *The Wind Will Carry Us* is to deny the audience practically any familiarity with the characters. Apart from Behzad, the head of the television crew sent to Iranian Kurdistan to film an ancient funeral ceremony, who is constantly onscreen, wandering distractedly from one place to another, constantly repeating the same gestures and actions during an endless wait, and little Farzad, who occasionally acts as his guide until he too finally turns his back on him, we are hardly allowed to see anybody else throughout the whole film. This is no longer just a matter of avoiding any of the usual devices that identify audiences with the characters, nor of surrounding the characters with an aura of mystery; they are purely and simply invisible, partly or completely. Mamad Haghighat points out, for example, that we have to wait nearly nine minutes before seeing the face of one of the protagonists, Behzad himself, and we do not get to see the other three members of his team at any time in the film. Neither are we allowed to see the old lady who is dying, the gravedigger or the people talking to Behzad on the telephone, and we manage to catch only one or two brief glimpses of the girl who attracts the outsider's interest. *The Wind Will Carry Us* is therefore a film whose characters are invariably absent from the screen, for all that we can hear them perfectly well.[15]

This strategy involved a radical stylistic choice by Kiarostami, which was the rejection of the classic shot-reverse shot technique; this, as Juan Miguel Company ably points out, is 'the organizing principle that defines the film', which is none other than a *showing* that accepts the inevitable obscurity of reality.[16] Kiarostami himself has described his objectives and methods in this way: 'There are eleven people in this movie who are not visible. At the end you know you haven't seen them, but you feel you know who they were

and what they were about. I want to create the type of cinema that shows by not showing.'[17] In order to do this, Kiarostami pares down even further the narrative elements of his film-making, not only rejecting any conventional constructions but also exploring in this specific case the structuring of the whole film around dead times. From the director's particular point of view, these dead times are related to a certain conception of time within Persian poetry,[18] but of course they directly contravene some of the basic rules of the prevailing model of narration, and involve a direct appeal to the audience, making them move away from the role to which the classic model inevitably condemns them.[19] This vigorous task of narrative deconstruction naturally leads in the end to a high level of abstraction, 'inviting us to abandon ourselves to an essentially audiovisual pleasure',[20] for the helpless spectator eventually understands that there is no secret to uncover, no parable to interpret and no particular codes to find. The simple fact is that *The Wind Will Carry Us* does not offer all the information we expect, nor in the way that we expect it, forcing the audience to make do with what (little) they see and hear and to construct the meaning of the film based on these same fragments, which nevertheless prove to be sufficient and – as we shall see – very rewarding.

Early on in the film, despite its elusive construction, the audience becomes aware that the mission of Behzad and his colleagues is about to fail.[21] They understand, no doubt hazily, that the long wait – apart from being 'a deliberate suspension of filmic time',[22] as Juan Miguel Company puts it – is going nowhere, narratively speaking, and that they might as well focus on what is being offered, because presumably there will be nothing *more* for the rest of the film. Or at least, there will only be more of the same, as with the routine of the calls to the mobile phone, repeated six times. The hurried climb to the highest point in the village to be able to use the phone has led some critics to think of Tati;[23] but the truth is that the joke is not innocent at all. The successive calls to Behzad's mobile, which he makes such tremendous efforts to receive, do not really add anything to the story; the protagonist, faced with the *impasse* caused by the fact that the 'dying' old lady is feeling better, merely fobs off Mrs Godarzi,

his boss in Tehran, and makes excuses to his wife for not being able to attend a family funeral ... because, ironically, he continues to await the other death, of a stranger. In this way, 'all his conversations with Tehran are in the end no more than false communication, a lie, idle chatter',[24] revealing the inability to withstand a lack of communication that undoubtedly afflicts Behzad at a deeper level.[25]

The case of the mobile telephone that is (almost) out of range also allows Kiarostami to set up a penetrating comparison between the needs and the way of life of the villagers and those of the visitors from the city. This is not only because, as the woman who serves him tea says mischievously to Behzad (whom she takes to be a telephone engineer), in the city 'everyone communicates very well', following laws and codes that are undoubtedly more complex than those of his unreliable mobile phone,[26] but because in the end the visitor is shown to be incapable of communicating with the locals, much less of fitting in. In a certain sense, *The Wind Will Carry Us* seems to bring to mind the experience of the director and his son in *Life and Nothing More ...*, two strangers in the region devastated by the earthquake who struggle to understand the rules of a community that is not their own; but here, what the protagonist finds is a real-life labyrinth around which he will never succeed in finding his way and which, strictly speaking, seems to defy the rules of logic to take on symbolic connotations beyond its physical-geographical nature.[27] Significantly, the only exception being the symbolic sequence in the dark cellar, Behzad wanders constantly around this labyrinth without ever entering a single house in the village or holding a real conversation with any of the locals; he is apparently incapable of changing his aloof and high-handed attitude. As in *Taste of Cherry*, but also in *Life and Nothing More ...*, Kiarostami constructs *The Wind Will Carry Us* around a series of meetings, and it is also these meetings that in the end make him adjust his outlook on life in one way or another. *The Wind Will Carry Us*, however, contains a higher level of ambiguity, as does the character of its protagonist.

To an even greater degree than the director character of *Life and Nothing More ...*, Behzad is presented as an arrogant person, selfish and occasionally cruel: not only because he takes out his bad mood

on an innocent tortoise by kicking it on to its back, but above all because he does not return the friendship and loyalty shown him by the little boy.[28] But there is clearly an element that is particularly important in this respect, namely, once again, the portrait of a film-maker, which is represented by the film's protagonist. Or perhaps we should call him a television director, because – although this is never really openly stated – *The Wind Will Carry Us* seems in any event to 'demote' its protagonist from the status of artist that other Kiarostami characters had in previous films.[29] Behzad spends almost the whole film obsessed with capturing the funeral ceremony on film, a fixation that prevents him from really opening up to the world around him and the people he comes across; they are mere instruments in a process whose single *raison d'être* is the accomplishment of a professional task. But Kiarostami explicitly questions his attitude by making the teacher who finally talks to Behzad about the ceremony end his speech with the brusque comment: 'You might find it interesting; I don't.' Obviously, the teacher is highlighting Behzad's cold-blooded interest in using the film medium to exploit an archaic and brutal ritual, while also implying that such things should not perhaps be filmed, or maybe that they should not simply be recorded in a way that is routine and therefore offensive.[30]

For Jonathan Rosenbaum, exploring in more detail what lies behind the character of Behzad, 'the particular ethics of *The Wind Will Carry Us* consist largely of Kiarostami reflecting on his own practice as a "media person" exploiting poor people: Behzad may be the closest thing in Kiarostami's work to a critical self-portrait, at least since the hero in his highly uncharacteristic 1977 feature *Report* [...] My point is that Kiarostami is critiquing the whole premise of his film-making from an ethical standpoint'.[31] Charles Tesson expresses a very similar view: 'It is tempting, if not simply logical, to see in this man a self-portrait of Kiarostami, during a shoot or on location, and to understand the film as a somewhat twisted discourse on method [...] After the two self-portraits of the director as Dr Jekyll (*Life and Nothing More ...*, *Through the Olive Trees*), Abbas Kiarostami shows us the Hyde aspect of his personality, very dark and just as disturbed. Although also more fascinating.'[32] Although he dilutes this possible

identification of himself among several characters, Kiarostami has admitted the autobiographical element that is once again apparent in *The Wind Will Carry Us*,[33] and this also provides us with the key to understanding the more philosophical dimension of the film.

Indeed, *The Wind Will Carry Us* ultimately tells the story of a journey of (self-)discovery, although in the beginning this is not on the protagonist's agenda at all, and the road that he must travel is even more tortuous than usual in Kiarostami's films. Confronted necessarily with an environment and a world that are strange to him, Behzad soon loses the only guide who can help him to find his way, little Farzad, who is offended by his arrogance. The calls to his mobile oblige him to climb the usual Kiarostami zig-zag path up the hill, but this clearly symbolic upward movement, away from the flat landscape where he finds himself lost, to reach (supposedly) a higher level of awareness,[34] does not in *The Wind Will Carry Us* produce the expected result – not, at least, for a good proportion of the film, as these trips are no more to Behzad, a slave to technology, than irritating and inconvenient dashes up to the lonely spot where the village cemetery is actually located. But then, just as the audience's patience is getting as exhausted as the protagonist's, an accident happens: while the gravedigger is digging a hole, it caves in on top of him, and Behzad is the only other person on the scene, the only one able to call for help to save him. Genuinely galvanized by the prospect of an imminent death and moved by an outburst of solidarity that he has never shown before, Behzad runs for help and even lends his car to the villagers so that they can take the injured man to hospital. Only now, as if by magic, as suddenly as the taxidermist burst on to the scene in *Taste of Cherry* to have his crucial conversation with Badii, the old country doctor appears on his moped; he is destined, naturally, to play the role of the guide or teacher (*pir*) that every journey of initiation requires.

Sitting on the back seat of the moped, Behzad travels between beautiful wheat fields while the old man talks to him constantly about the goodness of nature and the virtues of life. As before in Kiarostami's films, and particularly in *Taste of Cherry*, life and death are presented as (necessarily interrelated) mirrors that reflect each

other.[35] The old doctor's words are clearly an invitation to Behzad to free himself of his obsession with pain and death, in order to enjoy the moment, even though life is evidently a constant and exhausting struggle.[36] But this necessarily involves starting to look at the world in a different way, and this advice to open the eyes of the heart as wide as or wider than those of the body is, according to Kiarostami, 'the main theme of the film'.[37] Now, of course *The Wind Will Carry Us* does not by any means end with this trip between the pleasant golden wheat fields. The screen abruptly fades to black, and then suddenly we are watching a short nocturnal sequence (in fact, just an establishing shot of the village), which inevitably suggests to the audience that the old lady has finally died, perhaps because it is the only time that night makes an appearance in the whole film.[38] Behzad, whose crew has already left for Tehran, cannot resist taking a few furtive photos, but straight afterwards he goes to wash his car beside a small stream, presumably preparing for his long journey home, but in what must also be interpreted as a rite of purification.

If it is not, argues Bergala, why would Kiarostami give such importance to this action and make it the closing sequence of the film? 'Why does this man, who is obviously short-sighted, feel a sudden need to clean his windscreen, which is of course covered in grime after all these comings and goings? But above all, why does Kiarostami feel the need to devote a (beautiful) shot to this apparently mundane activity? Undoubtedly because this shot, elegantly and brilliantly, brings to a close the most important discourse in this enigmatic film, which is the re-education of the gaze.'[39] But this is also the moment Behzad chooses to throw into the stream the bone the gravedigger had given him a few days before; it has been sitting on the dashboard of his car. Significantly, 'the last shot of the film follows the bone as it is carried downstream [...] The bone in the river, the water flowing, the goats grazing: undoubtedly "life goes on", exactly the same as when the tortoise manages to get back on its feet and climbs up the tombstone, or the beetle rolls a ball over and over. However, it would seem that this is not so much about the perpetual cycle of life and death [...] as about the vanishing away and turning [of all things] to dust', a recurring motif in Khayyam's

poetry, which is undoubtedly conjured up here by Kiarostami in a deliberate and explicit way.[40] Nobody has explained and condensed the meaning of the closing sequence of *The Wind Will Carry Us* better than Bergala: 'The treasure that Behzad jokingly told the boy when they first met that he had come to the village to search for is without a doubt what he has by this time found when he throws the bone into the river. But it was not, of course, what he came looking for. Now he has found a new way of looking at the world, one that is free of all impure motivations and from any utilitarian mentality, open to whatever might happen unexpectedly on the uncontrollable fringes of vision, ready to accept the enigma of "otherness". The grimy windscreen, through which Kiarostami has refused to let his own vision as a film-maker focus, is now perfectly clean.'[41]

The transformation that Behzad undergoes is, as we have seen, in keeping with some of the usual patterns in other journeys of initiation in Kiarostami's work (the recognition of loneliness, the presence of the guide or teacher, the nocturnal sequence ...). However, this time the experience has much to do with the (re)discovery of nature, and one of the key sequences of the film is in fact the ride between the wheat fields. Undoubtedly, *Life and Nothing More* ... and even *Through the Olive Trees* (at least in the final section) had already echoed this profound concern of the director's, but in neither case with such strength and relevance. Rashmi Doraiswamy has come to interpret the film as a variation on the theme of civilization and its failings, played out against the backdrop of a primeval landscape.[42] Indeed, Behzad's journey and his discovery of nature are not so much the result of reaching outward as of a retreat into himself: he experiences 'a journey of discovery following a shipwreck'.[43] Nature thus serves as a healing power in the midst of a desolate society: 'With Kiarostami,' says Ishaghpour, 'we might speak of an "internal exile" where the countryside of Iran represents his "great beyond", his paradise, which consists of revealing its beauty in his images.'[44] This issue becomes doubly important when we notice the director's increasing devotion to photography, always with nature as its only theme, and when we listen to Kiarostami's thoughts on the subject.

'My photos are not the result of my love for photography, but

of my love of nature', Kiarostami categorically declares.[45] And when he insists that photography has taken the place of painting as a form of personal therapy,[46] his statement must be seen in the light of this vocation as a landscape artist. The first exhibitions of his photographs in the West, which coincided with the publication of an anthology in France and also with the first showing of *The Wind Will Carry Us*, not only confirmed the parallels between both of his artistic facets but above all revealed a common attitude to both of them. For Kiarostami, 'photography expresses creative feelings and is a way of finding peace: there is a rare purity in this domain [...] I love looking at things. Looking in silence, particularly at nature. When you love someone, you take their picture: just look at family [photo] albums. Mine is full of photos of nature'.[47] Therapy, peace, purity, internal exile ... Nature appears to fulfil some of Kiarostami's basic needs through photography and film-making, and he openly endorses the traditional aversion to interior spaces that is so characteristic of Persian art. The extreme restraint of Kiarostami's photographs, very different in this regard from the imagery of the Garden of Paradise used, for example, in classical miniatures, should not give rise to any doubt about their extraordinary importance for the director.[48] Ultimately, what we have here are two different ways of gaining a certain enlightenment, of dealing with an experience of the sublime that transcends the limitations of the material world.[49]

The Wind Will Carry Us, above all in the last part, seems to be aiming to recreate the world of its director's photographic work on the cinema screen. The meeting with the old doctor and his ride between the wheat fields give Kiarostami the perfect opportunity to portray the glories of nature that have been obsessively recorded in his photographs for many years, but above all it provides an appropriate backdrop for the philosophical reflections suggested by the director. These are based, however, on another of the central features of Kiarostami's work: the rich poetic tradition of his country. As we have seen before, Omar Khayyam again becomes an essential reference within Kiarostami's discourse, providing the background to the crucial conversation between Behzad and the doctor. But *The Wind Will Carry Us* introduces something new

here: for the first time in a Kiarostami film, various characters recite the poems at different moments during the film. This practice, undoubtedly common within Iranian culture, moreover takes on the quality of a declaration of principles in the film, and in this way, the Khayyam quatrain recited by the doctor is doubtless intended to capture a certain wisdom that Behzad will finally accept:

> They say houris make the gardens of Paradise delicious,
> I say that the juice of the vine is delicious,
> Take this cash and reject that credit –
> The sound of a distant drum, brother, is sweet.[50]

Behzad does not simply and willingly accept this invitation to enjoy the moment and appreciate the superiority of earthly beauty – which nature, to look no further, exemplifies – over any one of the promises of heaven: instead, he objects to the doctor's reasoning, reminding him that heaven is supposedly much more beautiful than all this. This rather out-of-place theological debate on the Vespa making its way through the gentle wheat fields ends, in fact, with another reference (this time indirect) to Khayyam, when the old man replies that no-one has yet come back from heaven to tell us whether it is or not.[51] Also for the first time in one of his films, Kiarostami openly addresses some thorny religious and theological issues in the film's dialogues. The crucial moment clearly arrives when little Farzad asks for Behzad's help in answering one of his exam questions: 'What happens on the Day of Judgement?' Behzad responds with a joke, which is inappropriate given that the boy is nervous and worried about the exam: 'The bad people go to heaven and the good ones to hell.' There is undoubtedly in this sequence, as Alain Masson says, a desire to caricature religious education,[52] but Behzad's reply probably encompasses a more general questioning of a whole series of generally accepted beliefs about which Kiarostami has on more than one occasion shown his scepticism.

The specific poetic references in *The Wind Will Carry Us* are not by any means restricted to the Khayyam connection we

have already discussed; apart from the quote from Sepehri at the beginning of the film and possibly other more indirect references, the title of the film itself comes from a famous poem by Forugh Farrokhzad (1934–1967), one of the most important figures in modern Iranian poetry and a genuine icon in the feminist tradition of her country.[53] Kiarostami has a special admiration for her work, but he had never before had the opportunity to pay tribute to her in his films: 'I like her poems very much. The one I chose for the title of the film fits perfectly with the theme I wanted to address. *The Wind Will Carry Us* means that sooner or later we have to die, and for that very reason we should enjoy life before the wind tears us, like leaves, off the tree where we thought we would stay forever.'[54] Kiarostami finds, moreover, an unmistakable vein of Khayyam in the sensualist side of Forugh's poetry, which is why he thought it not inappropriate to combine both influences in the same film.[55] A lonely and tormented figure, Forugh Farrokhzad compresses many of the defining features of her personality into this poem, and also achieves a remarkable quality of expression. Included in her indispensable anthology, *Rebirth* (*Tavalod-e digar*, 1964), "The Wind Will Carry Us" is one of her greatest poetic achievements and Kiarostami makes intelligent use of it, not only for the title of his film but also to construct one of its most symbolic and conclusive scenes.

The sequence where the poem is recited comes right in the middle of the film, when Behzad – overwhelmed by curiosity, and using the excuse of going to get some milk – goes to the house of the young girl who is carrying on a furtive relationship with the gravedigger. An unhealthy curiosity tainted with voyeurism, as Charles Tesson maintains,[56] prompts Behzad to follow the girl down to the cellar, and after twenty seconds of darkness, while she gets ready to milk the cow by the light of an oil lamp, he starts to flirt with her, reciting poems by Forugh Farrokhzad. During this long seven-minute sequence we never see the face of the modest girl, on which the lamp throws no light, and so we cannot tell exactly what her reaction is to Behzad's advances. But Forugh's verses make the cellar walls ring:

If you come to my house, friend,
Bring me a lamp and a window I can look through
At the crowd in the happy alley.[57]

But suddenly Behzad stops reciting this poem of hope and starts to intone the much more solemn and poignant "The Wind Will Carry Us". As in Omar Khayyam's poetry, sensualism is tinged here with a hint of desperation in the face of the inevitability of death; pleasure and fear go hand in hand in an acceptance of living for the moment, which is at the same time serenely joyful and deeply sorrowful. Forugh's world has a magnificent counterpart in Kiarostami's films, and his debt to her most certainly goes far beyond borrowing the title of this poem.[58]

THE WIND WILL TAKE US

In my small night, ah
The wind has a date with the leaves of the trees
In my small night there is agony of destruction
Listen
Do you hear the darkness blowing?
I look upon this bliss as a stranger
I am addicted to my despair
Listen
Do you hear the darkness blowing?
Something is passing in the night
The moon is restless and red
And over this rooftop
Where crumbling is a constant fear
Clouds, like a procession of mourners,
Seem to be waiting for the moment of rain.
A moment,
And the nothing
Night shudders beyond this window
And the earth winds to a halt
Beyond this window

Something unknown is watching you and me.
O green from head to foot
Place your hands like a burning memory
In my loving hands
Give your lips to the caresses
Of my loving lips
Like the warm perception of being
The wind will carry us
The wind will carry us.[59]

However, as Juan Miguel Company points out, 'Kiarostami's anthropological vision is also tinged with historic and social conditioning',[60] and *The Wind Will Carry Us* does return to some of Kiarostami's perennial concerns for the *hic et nunc*. The feature that is particularly new in this film is of course its penetration into an area hitherto virtually unknown in Iranian films: the real Iranian Kurdistan.[61] Kiarostami, with his proverbial discretion, maintains that he chose this region to film only because it was ideal for the project (the story by Mahmud Aydin that the film is based on actually took place in Kurdistan) and also out of a certain curiosity. When he was asked whether he had intended to draw attention to the situation of the Kurds in any way, he replied: 'It was really just personal curiosity. I didn't know that region and I wanted to see with my own eyes what lay behind that name, "Kurdistan", which has attracted so much attention in our social and political lives. But there was no direct political motive.'[62] However, on other occasions he has qualified this response and left the door open to other possible interpretations: 'This is a people that live in my country, in a region I didn't know. A people who can withstand anything, be it natural disaster or other kinds of problems. You can't say that's not political. Obviously, when we talk about their lives, we are also providing important information.'[63]

It would perhaps be exaggerating to say, as Marco Dalla Gassa does, that 'going to shoot a film in a village in Kurdistan implies support for the Kurdish cause', and that it would be difficult

to attempt any analysis of the film leaving out this fact,[64] but undoubtedly Kiarostami's attitude is not sterile in the least. The pretext that takes the film crew to this remote village in Iranian Kurdistan, the filming of an ancient funeral rite, also becomes the reason for a peaceful confrontation between two unconnected worlds, two separate ways of life that are meeting for the first time, with unforeseeable results. Kiarostami himself exemplifies this experience of life outside the big city and contact with socio-political realities of which up till then he had had only a very vague and biased knowledge. This is ultimately one of the most powerful themes that underpin *The Wind Will Carry Us*, which has led Alain Bergala to make a curious comparison with the situation at the beginning of *The Castle* by Franz Kafka.[65] However, we do not need to look for references outside Kiarostami's own films, since in a way *The Wind Will Carry Us* is a reprint of the experience of the director in *Life and Nothing More ...*, who finds himself in a place that is only vaguely and superficially familiar, having to feel its internal pulse patiently through contact with the people who live there. The great difference between the two films lies, however, in the continual sensation of failure that Behzad's experience produces in the audience.

In one of its many false trails and misleading clues, *The Wind Will Carry Us* introduces the character of the boy, Farzad, apparently as a guide who will help the stranger find his way around the maze-like village and, more importantly, act as mediator between the director and its inhabitants, who are distant, inscrutable and remote, a separation that is intensified by language barriers. But this role of mediator between the man from the city and a community still anchored in nature and governed by different customs is soon abandoned by Farzad, worried as usual by his schoolwork; he ends up by being deeply disillusioned with the lack of friendship his adult partner offers.[66] Behzad continues his wait – and with it his erratic wanderings through the village and its environs – but now he has no alternative but to face this strange world alone, a world which, not even after the gravedigger's accident and his personal transformation, he will probably never come to understand.

'In the film the director observes the locals, as they do him, but

there is no relationship between them [...] *The Wind Will Carry Us* is not concerned, therefore, with the village's inhabitants', maintains Ishaghpour, insisting that Kiarostami was not interested in making an ethnographic or documentary film.[67] True though this may be, however muted the presence of the villagers (especially the men, busy with their agricultural labours outside the village and therefore not seen by Behzad or the audience), however impossible the dialogue and any personal contact with the outsider, Kiarostami's depiction of them is always affectionate. We feel sympathy not only for Farzad but also for the old lady, who serves tea and talks about the three main occupations of women (home, work and bed) and for the woman who goes back to work in the fields the day after giving birth.[68] Kiarostami's observations (always indirect) speak to us in any case of a monumentally difficult struggle for survival in an extremely isolated area (the lack of coverage for the mobile phone is proof enough of this). For David Walsh, this makes *The Wind Will Carry Us* into a film that bears a strong critical stamp, in which socio-political issues play a central part[69] and in which, according to Marco Dalla Gassa, 'the director continues to propose, "between the lines", his vision of nations living peacefully alongside each other (a discourse which had already shown its importance in *Taste of Cherry*, which made reference, through the character of the Kurdish soldier, to the situation of his people)'.[70]

Ironically, the shooting of *The Wind Will Carry Us* turned into a very trying experience for Kiarostami, partly because of the filming conditions and the difficulties in communicating with the local inhabitants, who were somewhat reluctant to cooperate in making the film, and partly because of the conflict that arose between him and his excellent director of photography, Mahmud Kalari, who was apparently incapable of getting out of bed before two o'clock in the afternoon, which had a severe impact on schedules and working conditions.[71] As if this were not enough, the difficult and tense location shoot was followed by a laborious process of editing and post-production work, which lasted nine months and was characterized by numerous differences of opinion between Kiarostami and his colleagues, to the point where he unhesitatingly

called the whole process 'a painful experience' and declared that if it had not been for his commitment to his co-producer in France, he might well have abandoned the project at some point; it was only when it was shown at the Venice Film Festival that he began to be reconciled to it.[72] Awarded the Jury's Grand Prize, *The Wind Will Carry Us* underwent the same fate as Kiarostami's previous films: an excellent international reception and a controversial domestic career, with the inevitable censorship problems[73] – nothing in any event that prevents us from considering *The Wind Will Carry Us* as one of the high points of Kiarostami's film career and also perhaps 'one of the most beautiful films of recent years'.[74]

Out of Africa

As a result of several previous communications, on 23rd March 2000 Kiarostami received a fax from the International Fund for Agricultural Development – a United Nations organization – confirming an unusual invitation to shoot a documentary in Uganda. *ABC Africa*, as the resulting full-length feature was called, actually begins by showing the reception of this fax and thereby informing the audience of the background to the film.[75] The complete text of the message accurately defines the nature and scope of the project, and therefore there is probably no better introduction – as Kiarostami surmised – to the film:

DATE: 23 March 2000
TO: Director Abbas Kiarostami, Tehran, Iran
FROM: Takao Shibata, Assistant President, IFAD
SUBJECT: Visit to UWESO Programme, Uganda

Dear Director Kiarostami,
I wish to take this opportunity to thank you for considering the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and for agreeing to visit the 'Uganda Women's Efforts to Save Orphans' (UWESO) programme. As you already know the UWESO

programme focuses on orphans who are being assisted by families, in particular women. A documentary conceptualised by you will give this issue greater relevance and also will help draw much international attention to the current situation of these orphans.

The brutality of the long civil unrest and the scourge of AIDS have left Uganda with about 1.6 million children and teenagers without one or both parents. About 10,000 orphans have so far benefited from the UWESO programme. However, its impact on the overall scope of the orphan problem in the country remains little.

We hope to be able to sensitise people around the world about the devastating dimensions of this tragedy, through the work of one of the greatest film directors of the modern world.

The Coordinator and members of the Communications and Public Affairs Unit of IFAD, other senior colleagues and I will be pleased to meet you in Rome on 19 April 2000 to learn from you how you may like to proceed with the production of the documentary. We would also like to brief you on IFAD's work in Uganda. On the same day of your visit to Rome, it will be my privilege to host a luncheon in your honour on behalf of the President of IFAD, Mr Fawzi H. Al-Sultan, who unfortunately will be out of the country on that date.

I am pleased to inform that we have already started planning your travel both to Rome and Kampala along with your colleague, Mr Seifollah Samadian. I should be grateful if you let us know, at your earliest convenience, of any particular arrangement you may require to make this trip most successful. Kindly find enclosed a background note on the UWESO project. Please accept my best wishes for a happy Noruz.

Looking forward to hearing from you soon.[76]

The project did in fact go forward and in the spring of 2000 Kiarostami went to Uganda with his colleague Seifollah Samadian to carry out an on-site investigation and to assess the possibilities with regard to making the documentary proposed by IFAD. Let us be clear that, contrary to popular belief, Samadian did not accompany Kiarostami as a mere 'assistant', but as a close and

important collaborator in the project. One of the most renowned Iranian photographers of modern times, the founder of *Tassvir* magazine and a professor at the University of Tehran, Samadian had actually just begun his activities in the film-making world with two marvellous shorts: *Tehran, the 25th Hour* (*Tehran, saat-e 25*, 1999), a disingenuous report about the joyful celebrations in the streets of Tehran following the national football team qualifying for the World Cup in France; and *The White Season* (*Istgah-e sefid*, 1999), a poetic depiction of the effects of a heavy snowfall in the same city, which is one of Kiarostami's favourite documentaries. So, both equipped with digital video cameras, Kiarostami and Samadian went to Uganda to discover the reality that they were eventually to record, and over a period of ten days they filmed more than twenty hours of material, which they meant to study on their return. Once back in Tehran, however, they both agreed that this simple fact-finding trip, this modest investigation on site, had already produced everything they could hope to show, and they decided to cancel the planned shoot and concentrate instead on what would turn out to be a tremendous piece of editing work.[77]

As Kiarostami later explained on various occasions, although the film in some ways made itself, with little planning or preparation, based on images filmed as they went along, the subsequent task of organizing and editing the material turned out to be very complex: 'We shot a pictorial travelogue and it took nearly twenty-five hours to shoot our film and another eight months to edit the film. In other words we had no previous experience of what we had shot in the film. We first sat down ourselves and watched the twenty-five-hour film or our own pictorial travelogue.'[78] In the final analysis, Kiarostami always considered *ABC Africa* to be the simple diary of a tourist, and the final cut of the film keeps to this format and structure. It is obvious that Kiarostami and Samadian are completely ignorant about the area they are visiting, the place they are filming, the language spoken by the vast majority of people they meet (only the use of English allows them to communicate with some Ugandans), the social and cultural context of the UWESO programme; but for this very reason they adopt the humble approach

of attentive visitors willing to be led, whose only option is to keep their eyes wide open. The first part of the film suffers particularly from this limitation, and *ABC Africa* is in danger of becoming a mere commissioned documentary, unavoidably weighed down by its institutional dimension. At a certain point, however, during the visit to the hospital in Masaka, a town in the heart of the region worst affected by AIDS, and the same night in a small local hotel, *ABC Africa* seems to have a change of heart, and its interest as a film increases considerably: 'From that moment on', as Olivier Joyard rightly points out, 'the deal with the organization [IFAD] is off'.[79]

Indeed, 'the film is constructed around a series of abrupt changes of tone, going from strictly educational mode (the man explaining how the aid programme works) to more personal insights and on to moments of pure contemplation when the camera lets itself be captivated by the real-life images it is filming'.[80] *ABC Africa* is far from being the masterpiece hailed by its most enthusiastic fans, but neither is it as mediocre as Kiarostami's detractors claim; the film should be seen as a simple personal diary, but it does not therefore lack interest and beauty, and it turns out to be perfectly consistent and illuminating within the context of the director's film work as a whole.[81] When he accepted the commission to make this film, his first documentary after ten years of wholesale dedication to fictional work, Kiarostami undoubtedly had very much in mind the magnificent precedent of *The House Is Black (Khane-ye siah ast*, 1962), the masterpiece shot by his admired Forugh Farrokhzad in a leper colony on the outskirts of Tabriz as part of a tuberculosis prevention campaign, which she converted into a personal project of exceptional poetic depth.[82] *ABC Africa* is a long way from achieving comparable results, but it does also become in the end a very personal film, in which we recognize a great many features that are familiar from Kiarostami's previous work, and it would be useful to examine these before going any further.

Although *ABC Africa* was indeed a relatively new development in Kiarostami's film-making, mainly because it was his first full-length feature made outside Iran and using digital video,[83] the film is nevertheless surprisingly close to the world of the director. For one

thing, making a commissioned film was nothing new to someone who spent so many years working for the Centre for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, following its guidelines, naturally, although departing from their literal interpretation as soon as he could. *ABC Africa* is, in addition, a film about children, a constant theme in Kiarostami's films, which, with the pretext here of the institutional aid programme to Ugandan orphans, is given the unexpected opportunity of a reprise, and the director obviously feels comfortable with this; ultimately, it allows him to deal in his own terms with a commission that might otherwise have proved very difficult. *ABC Africa* also tells the story, like so many other Kiarostami films, of a journey: a real journey, but above all one of discovery. Kiarostami's travels in Uganda are definitely reminiscent of the director and his son's journey in *Life and Nothing More* ..., something that Kiarostami himself has often pointed out.[84] And lastly, *ABC Africa*, inevitably given the circumstances and the nature of the shoot, also deals with the relationship between films and reality. Far from trying to conceal his active role in shooting the film, Kiarostami demonstrates his interference with the real situation around him as soon as he possibly can, and he often appears in front of the camera, filmed by Samadian: 'His honesty', maintains Olivier Joyard, 'actually consists in constantly defining himself as the organizer of reality',[85] an ethical stance that probably goes right to the roots of the project and Kiarostami's acceptance of the commission.

ABC Africa echoes *Life and Nothing More* ... quite clearly in its contention that life goes on even in the most tragic circumstances and amid great suffering, but it would be a mistake to think that this is all there is to the film. Kiarostami undoubtedly highlights the efforts of the Ugandans to rebuild their country and the bottomless well of vitality represented by the little orphans who play a central role. He constantly films the children singing and dancing, even joining in with them in a musical outburst, an unusual event in a Kiarostami film after thirty years of extreme austerity.[86] But the optimism that certainly at times bursts out from *ABC Africa* inevitably has its counterpart of sadness and uncertainty. Kiarostami

never hides the terrible features of a situation that, once again, he makes an effort to share. Not only do the harrowing facts quoted in the first part of the film speak for themselves, but the director also continually stresses the difficult living conditions in the area and specifically condemns the Catholic Church's involvement in perpetuating a calamitous situation through its inflexible stance on issues of sexuality and procreation; and in the final sequence of the film, he casts a deliberate shadow of doubt over the fate of the little orphan girl lovingly adopted by an Austrian couple. Life goes on, certainly, but not without pain and suffering.

In fact, and despite the obvious and undeniable reminders of *Life and Nothing More ...*, *ABC Africa* has even closer links with *The Wind Will Carry Us*. Now Kiarostami, without a film *alter ego* or any other kind of protective shield, must find a practical answer to the question of how to film sorrow and death. As we might expect, the director avoids any kind of sentimentality or sensationalism;[87] hard-hitting images and even the presence of death in *ABC Africa* are confined to a single sequence. The visit to the hospital in Masaka, undoubtedly the pivotal sequence of the whole film (which straight afterwards sets off on a different course, abandoning the apparently educational purpose that had inspired it up to that point), has a disturbing surprise in store for the film-makers: they witness the construction of a makeshift cardboard coffin to hold the body of a child who has just died, which a simple bicycle will take to its humble grave. Filmed basically by Samadian from a respectful distance, the sequence contains several shots where Kiarostami appears on screen: the tense expression on his face shows the director's distress at the sight of others' suffering and in using the images of this suffering. Perhaps Olivier Joyard is right in thinking that *ABC Africa* suffers throughout from an overly neutral tone, in which emotion, compassion and even 'genuine cruelty' are missing, cloaked in a mantle of discretion which is at times a little bland;[88] but Kiarostami was certainly well aware of the kind of film he wanted to make.

The sequence that follows this visit to the hospital, which basically consists of a long seven-minute shot in (almost) total darkness when the electricity in Kiarostami and Samadian's hotel goes off,

is the occasion for a conversation that reveals many elements of the director's 'philosophy' and practically amounts to a declaration of his principles.[89] 'Human beings have the good fortune of being able to adapt themselves to any situation', declares the director, after reflecting on the heroic way of life of the locals; but the door is left open for a wider interpretation. Still in the dark, they both go back to their rooms. Shortly afterwards, lightning from a sudden storm flashes intermittently through the window, while the sound of rain replaces that of the previous conversation; then, all of a sudden, dawn is breaking through the same window, bringing to a close what is undoubtedly the most beautiful scene in *ABC Africa*; a perfect reprise of the experiment tried out in *The Birth of Light*.

The fact-finding trip yielded enough good-quality shots to serve as the basis of the full-length documentary that had been commissioned. In addition, the realization of the advantages offered by the use of digital video undoubtedly convinced Kiarostami to cancel the subsequent shoot of the planned documentary for IFAD. During an interview at the end of 1997, Kiarostami had already expressed very clearly his awareness of the limited capability of the conventional film-making process to give a true reflection of the real world, outlining at the same time a kind of Utopian dream of being able to record that same world without the limitations imposed by working with a film crew: 'A film never manages to reconstitute more than a part, of greater or lesser importance, of what it records. My greatest desire is to be able to make films one day with no cameras, no microphones, no crew.'[90] Working with digital video was a completely new experience for Kiarostami when he went to Uganda, and it turned out to be a highly satisfactory one: in some ways it allowed him to come close to achieving this long-standing dream of freedom in filming the real world, even more important when dealing with a documentary.

'I didn't use this new digital camera as a serious work tool. I took it with me more like a still camera, to take some notes with it. But when I actually started using it – and when I realized its possibilities and what I could do with them – I realized that I have wasted, in a way, thirty years of my career using the 35mm

camera, because that camera, for the type of work that I do, is more of a hindrance than a communicating tool. When I say "35mm camera", I'm not just referring to the machine itself, but to what it brings with it – the whole crew. That's the kind of thing that's not for me or the kind of movies that I make. I like to work with this much smaller camera, which is more intimate and more immediate. For example, for people who appear in front of it, they are not intimidated by it. They are more comfortable in front of the digital camera and so, in every way, it facilitates communication [...] Now, this digital camera makes it possible for everybody to pick it up, like a pen. If you have the right vision, and you think you're an instinctive film-maker, there's no hindrance any more. You just pick it up, like a pen, and work with it. I predict that, in the next century, there will be an explosion of interest in film-making, and that will be the impact of the digital camera.'[91] Regardless of the outcome of Kiarostami's prediction and the natural moderation of his initial overwhelming enthusiasm for the new medium, the fact is that after exploring its possibilities in *ABC Africa*, he has continued to work with the digital video format to date, including the innovative experience of his full-length feature *Ten*.

All About My Mother

'A foolish effort, a kind of squaring the circle which is simultaneously extremely ambitious and very humble',[92] *Ten* represents the culmination of the headlong progress of a Kiarostami who is increasingly involved in a daring exploration of what he calls 'the disappearance of direction', by which he means 'the rejection of all elements vital to ordinary cinema'.[93] Following the cautious experiment of *ABC Africa*, *Ten* would exploit the potential of digital video to the utmost, reducing the interference of the film-making process to an absolute minimum and dispensing almost completely with a film crew in the usual sense of the term. The film looks to be the height of simplicity, although in fact a lengthy and painstaking

preparation lies behind it. But, as Kiarostami himself explains: 'In this form of cinema, the director is more like a football coach. He has to do most of his work before the take starts.'[94] The increasing minimalism of Kiarostami's films is not easy or comfortable to approach, and in this sense, as Matthieu Darras points out, *Ten* represents one of the greatest challenges ever taken on by the director. 'The problem I have,' he admits, 'is that given the path I have chosen, I have to keep taking bigger risks if I don't want to turn back. It's like when you make a pile of bricks: you get to a point where the whole structure ends up collapsing. As you go higher it gets more difficult. But you mustn't back down. You can make a good film which is just that, a good film. But sometimes there are films which are not so good, but they are still worthwhile because they suggest new directions.'[95] From this point of view at least, *Ten* is without any doubt whatsoever one of the bravest film projects of recent years.

But what in fact is *Ten*? Structurally speaking, *Ten* is no more than a collection of ten sequences – hence the title, obviously – in which a woman has different conversations with her various passengers as she drives through the streets of Tehran. Numbered in descending order like start bands, constituting a sort of countdown, these ten short pieces – each filmed from only two fixed cameras mounted on the dashboard of the car – display Kiarostami's long-standing penchant for repetition and minimal resources, but once again the audience's predictable fatigue soon turns into a stimulating intellectual and emotional participation in the new game: 'the end of a profoundly original journey in the context of modern cinema, this visual object – difficult to define, as it develops and encompasses fiction, documentary and experimental video all at once – succeeds in capturing, above and beyond the story and any possible message, the very essence of a certain conception of cinema'.[96]

Completely ignored by the jury at the 2002 Cannes Festival, where Kiarostami again competed five years after being awarded the Golden Palm for *Taste of Cherry* – thus contravening his earlier decision to stop competing in film festivals[97] – *Ten* is a film whose relevance within the director's career will probably take some time to determine with any accuracy. Given the lack of any

proper perspective, there are nevertheless various elements that are sufficiently clear to allow a tentative analysis. The rich intertwining of the conversations that structure the film do not exactly make it easy – as various critics have already commented – to identify any single theme in *Ten*,[98] but despite this, the exploration of the lives of women in modern Iran definitely emerges as one of its most powerful concerns. This is a genuinely new development in Kiarostami's films, which also involves a return to an urban setting for the first time in many years;[99] the pre-eminence of women characters has naturally been the focus of the first discussions and evaluations of *Ten*.

Kiarostami has in the past sometimes been asked why he has not paid sufficient attention to women's issues in his films, and he has generally tended to excuse himself on the grounds of the severe restrictions imposed by the censors on the way women characters were shown, saying that he did not want to give any false impressions as a result.[100] Lately his views seem to have changed, and his decision to dedicate a film to these issues was entirely deliberate and premeditated: 'I think I've come very late to this exploration of women's issues [...] Leaving women out of my films was not a very intelligent decision: I made this discovery rather late, but there it is, I have made it.' Kiarostami nevertheless went on to say: 'I can assure you that it is all [in *Ten*] very true to life, and I really am giving a realistic picture of the Iranian middle-class woman as she actually is. In other Iranian films there is always someone who goes around adjusting the women's headscarves just before they start filming, but that is frankly the death of cinema.'[101] In fact, the protagonist of the film plays herself to a certain extent: Mania Akbari, a young painter with no acting experience, is, according to Kiarostami, 'in real life the divorced mother of one son whom we see on the screen'.[102] And during the same interview the director stated that he had not only been writing the script for over two years 'based on a few "real-life" situations', but that for the sake of authenticity he had even, for example, gone to the lengths of writing the dialogue between the protagonist and the prostitute based on his own telephone conversations with real prostitutes in Tehran.[103]

In fact, and as several critics rightly pointed out at the time,[104]

The Wind Will Carry Us had already introduced some significant new ways of treating women characters, albeit still indirectly or even off-screen. The woman in the *shaikhané* who talks ironically about women's nocturnal tasks, the pregnant woman who goes back to work in the fields the day after giving birth, the teenage girl who wants to know whether women can write poetry too and of course Mrs Godarzi, Behzad's energetic producer back in the city who calls him constantly to find out how the project is going: together they constitute a small gallery of 'strong women' characters who definitely do not appear in Kiarostami's film by mere chance. This progressive move towards women's issues burst forth, however, in a wholly unexpected way in *Ten*, with a harshness and severity that are just as impressive as the uncompromising approach of his 'protégé' Jafar Panahi in the equally splendid *The Circle* (*Dayereh*, 2000), a film that shares profound similarities with *Ten* despite using completely different narrative and formal techniques.[105] Instead of the virtuosity and angry pathos displayed by Panahi, Kiarostami chooses to enclose his characters inside the small space of a car, and it is from this unusual and unlikely vantage point that Kiarostami, without even changing the camera position, offers us his devastating portrayal of women's lives in Iran at the start of the 21st century.

Ten focuses its attention on the character of a young divorced mother, struggling between the demands of her professional career, a new relationship and especially the raising of a rather difficult son. Driving through the streets of Tehran, she has several arguments with this son, but she also strikes up conversations and exchanges confidences with other women whom for various reasons she takes to one place or another in the city. Her sister, with whom she does not appear to have much in common; an old lady who is seeking solace in religion in order to abide her miserable life, scarred by the death of her son; a prostitute with a cynical attitude to men and sex; a friend who is carrying on a problematic relationship with a man who in the end refuses to marry her ... these are the women characters displayed by Kiarostami, together with his long-suffering protagonist, in a kind of pathetic series of duets inside a vehicle, which seems to be the only possible setting for these very intimate

conversations. *Ten* is a film that presents the problems and opinions of its characters in an extremely crude way. They talk about issues that are completely unheard-of in modern Iranian films: love, falling out of love, sex, prostitution, abortion, drugs and corruption within the legal system are just some of the key terms in the lexicon of the film, made of course without any kind of authorization or permission from the Iranian authorities and obviously destined to be banned.

However, four of the ten sequences feature the driver's son along with the protagonist herself, a fact that should not escape our notice when we attempt any analysis of the film. The only male character in *Ten* (his father, the protagonist's ex-husband, appears only fleetingly in a background shot), the boy at only ten years old seems to personify the patriarchal mentality of his father. All his conversations with his mother, whom he accuses of being selfish and a liar, turn into colossal arguments. The long (sixteen-minute) opening sequence is not only specific and continuing proof of Kiarostami's extraordinary skill in directing non-professional actors; it is also characterized by a level of verbal violence that is hard for audiences to bear. Painstakingly rehearsed for four months, this is undoubtedly the best of the ten sequences and it plainly establishes the harsh tone of the film right from the start. Humiliated by her own son, who can't stand her and can't stand his stepfather, and just wants to go and live with his father, the protagonist patiently endures the boy's complaints, making a constant effort (with more or less success) to keep smiling: fortitude is no doubt her greatest virtue, the supreme quality that enables her to rise above the situation and despite everything still remain proud of the choices she has freely made throughout her life.[106] A long-standing feature in Kiarostami's films, this ethos of freedom and fortitude quite definitely takes on personal connotations in this film too.[107]

Ten is, therefore, a film that is harrowing and fascinating in equal parts, as brave as it is honest, but also – and perhaps surprisingly, given its radically austere format – deeply moving. The last but one sequence, where the protagonist tries to comfort her friend when the man she loves has ended up leaving her, Kiarostami breaks

the rules he has so rigidly enforced up to that moment to permit some brief and tender physical contact between his characters.[108] Abandoned by her lover, the friend has shaved her head, and she cries inconsolably as, in a loud voice, she lists all the reasons for her unhappiness. When she timidly removes her *chador* and reveals her shaved head – a highly controversial image for Iranian spectators[109]– the protagonist appears in the same shot to wipe her tears away. 'Unfortunately sometimes you lose', is all she manages to say. Not a very optimistic message for a film that is about to end.

For indeed the countdown is nearly over. The last section of the film, headed by the number one, is the shortest of the ten, and all it does is to repeat deliberately certain images we have already seen, in which, from a distance and with hardly a word between them, the boy gets out of his father's car and into his mother's, to spend a few hours with her. Once again Kiarostami uses repetition for purposes that have nothing to do with merely playing with form; he implies, certainly, that life goes on, but in an unchanging way, as if the closed world described in *Ten* were condemned to last forever. His vision is in any event deeply pessimistic, and although in some ways the film is a very good illustration of the rebuilding of a dynamic and multiform public space, which is also highly problematic in post-revolutionary Iran,[110] the director does not seem to get his hopes up too much. The film ends at the point where, according to the misleading countdown, it perhaps ought to begin. But it has all been said. In the press book for the premiere of *Ten*, Kiarostami recounts a story told by Milan Kundera, about how his father's vocabulary diminished with age until he was left with only two words, which summed up his life's experience and his perception of reality: 'How strange!' The anecdote is very relevant, because Kiarostami uses it to help to sum up his conception of *Ten*: 'This film is my own "two words". It sums up almost everything. I say "almost" because I'm already thinking about my next film. A one-word film perhaps.'[111]

Dream of Light

The progressive refinement of form and style undoubtedly led Kiarostami to undertake some of his most experimental and radical work – now collected under the common title of *Five* – just after the productive experience of making *Ten*. In parallel, however, with this leaning towards a kind of visual poetry that is moreover powerfully linked to his photographic work, Kiarostami embarked on the making of a curious documentary about his own film-making methods.[112] *10 on Ten*, as it was finally called, was originally intended to be an extra feature on the DVD edition of *Ten* that was launched in France by the actual co-producer of the film, Marin Karmitz; but it was also presented with all the usual honours in the *Un certain regard* category of the 2004 Cannes Festival.

Divided into ten chapters that consider the same number of relevant aspects of film-making and Kiarostami's personal experience, *10 on Ten* is not in fact a documentary about *Ten*, as its title seems to suggest, but a wider-reaching reflection. Behind the wheel of his 4x4, the director revisits the shooting locations of *Taste of Cherry* and 'embarks on a long soliloquy', which starts significantly with 'an introductory chapter, dedicated to the tremendous impact the digital camera has had on his work'.[113] The controversial epilogue to *Taste of Cherry* in fact marked Kiarostami's first recourse to this new medium, which he has continued to use up to the present date, and this return to the dusty tracks on the outskirts of Tehran was therefore a particularly appropriate way for him to impart his lesson on the subject. In this lesson, Kiarostami is still enthusiastic about the possibilities of the digital camera: 'This camera allows artists to work alone again' and, thanks to this creative independence, it is 'an invitation to new discoveries',[114] far from the routine and complacent development of the huge film-making industry of the present day. Kiarostami wastes no opportunity to condemn Hollywood's complete domination of cinema screens throughout the world, which in the long run, he suggests, is more powerful even than the US military machine, and in contrast to Hollywood's usual technological

paraphernalia he lays claim to a kind of *arte povera*, which is heir to the pioneering films of the early days of cinema, when film-makers were capable of producing marvellous works of art 'with so little'.

'This is my way, this is my method, which is only one method among many others', Kiarostami recognizes in the last section of the film ('The Last Lesson'). And he stresses several times, as if there could still be any doubt about it, the strongly autodidactic element in his work. These and other little personal notes, together with the director's obvious sense of irony and the playful attitude he demonstrates at various times during the film (above all in the final sequence), are the most interesting features of *10 on Ten*, given that Kiarostami's lessons simply reformulate theses and opinions that are already sufficiently well-known from numerous texts and interviews that have materialized over the years. However, after his radical support for 'the disappearance of direction' in *Ten*, to be given a lesson by a vigorous and very self-assured Kiarostami at the steering wheel, virtually at all times in front of the camera, is still a luxury for any cinemagoer who is at all interested in his work.

The film *Five*, which was also presented, out of competition, at the 2004 Cannes Festival, is a much more ambitious project, which nevertheless came about in an unexpected and almost fortuitous way. While he was staying on the shores of the Caspian Sea in the summer of 2002, Kiarostami started to film with his digital camera 'apparently insignificant things [happening around him], things which nevertheless if observed at enough length, reflected a whole world'.[115] Among all this material five 'long takes' seemed to be the most interesting, and it was these that Kiarostami presented as a video installation at the vast retrospective inaugurated in Turin in September 2003, with the simple title 'Five Long Takes by Abbas Kiarostami'. Very satisfied with his work, but firmly convinced that this was not the appropriate format for viewing it, the director reformulated his 'five long takes' as a single film at the 5th NHK Asian Film Festival in Tokyo in November, and more than willingly joined in the tribute dedicated to Yasujiro Ozu on the centenary of his birth: *Five: Dedicated to Ozu* thus became the official title of the film, although shortly afterwards it would be shown at

Cannes with the simple and definitive title of *Five* (with 'Five Long Takes Dedicated toYasujiro Ozu' as a composite subtitle).

Alain Bergala is undoubtedly right to underline the surprising radicalism of the *Five* project, above all coming from a director of world renown who had at his disposal all kinds of resources and facilities for his work and who nevertheless chose to reject them in order to 'film with absolute freedom, alone, removed from any kind of production restraints, with a DV camera and equal amounts of care and patience', these minimalist shots 'slowly and implacably distilled based on a new experiment in film-making that Kiarostami has been conducting for the last two years at least'.[116] In fact, *Five* is a masterful validation of a line of work that had been anticipated over many previous years by other of the director's works. *The Birth of Light* is the obvious example, but we might also cite the experiences of *Sleepers* and *Ten Minutes Older* (which was in fact rejected by the producers, who thought 'that there was no work in it at all',[117] and consigned to obscurity until it was shown as a video installation at the Kiarostami event at Turin 2003). It is a type of work that, to use Kiarostami's own words, 'can in some ways form a relationship with poetry or with painting, and thereby free itself from the narrative obligation and the servitude of direction'.[118]

A log bobbing about on the seashore, a few people walking tediously up and down the promenade, separate groups of dogs and ducks wandering along the beach for reasons that we do not discover and some frogs croaking at night in a nearby pond by the light of a moon that is temporarily hidden by summer storm clouds: these are all the elements that Kiarostami uses to weave the fabric of his work. But, as Geoff Andrews quite rightly commented after an early viewing of these 'long takes', 'what binds his work together [is] not so much the narrative or visual content [...] as the contemplative quality of his gaze'.[119] More than ever, Kiarostami's audience requires great patience in order to discover gradually what lies behind these apparently anodyne images or simply to enjoy them without the usual need to *understand* them, something on which Kiarostami has insisted on very many occasions – including the lesson of *10 on Ten* – and which, in his opinion, could bring cinema closer to the experience of

poetry or music, in contrast to the usual parameters of mainstream narrative cinema. It is what Bergala has appropriately called 'the belief in a cinema without a story, in both senses of the term: cinema before the story of cinema, and cinema that does not necessarily have to tell a story, although stories might well surface in this kind of cinema'.[120]

Genuine 'ciné-poèmes', as Stéphane Goudet has openly taken to calling them, these five 'long takes by Abbas Kiarostami', on the border between the director's photographic and poetic work, resemble more than anything else a collection of *haikus* where 'the act of documenting leans towards lyrical abstraction'.[121] True to his personal creed, Kiarostami argues that 'we create not by adding, but by subtracting' – a maxim that in *10 on Ten* he attributes to Bresson – and in this way with *Five* he makes an appeal for a kind of audiovisual detoxification: 'audiences can go to see it and rinse out their eyes with it, as if it were a drop of water'.[122] His is a radical call for a contemplative cinema that should not, however, be understood as a mere passive recording of reality, but rather as an investigation that sculpts in light and time, the better to reveal it. As Jonathan Romney rightly says, 'although *Five* feigns to stand back and record slices of the world, it is really a profoundly, and wittily, contrived film'.[123] Kiarostami has not only carefully and extensively reworked – manipulated, if you will – the soundtrack and introduced subtle jump cuts that justify the inclusion of these celebrated long takes in the particular gallery of 'lies' that the director has taken such pleasure in allowing himself throughout his work, but he also even appears to have eliminated during processing an unwanted intrusion in a particular take ...[124] This is why, beyond its undeniable merits and beauty, *Five* must be seen above all as 'the very essence of the power, of *all* the powers, of cinema, of those which are used in pursuit of the revelation of reality and equally of those which seek to manipulate it'.[125] There could be no better summary, then, for the work of a director such as Kiarostami, forever involved in the exploration of the subtle boundaries between *truth* and *illusion*. Whatever course Kiarostami's film-making takes in the future, *Five* will surely remain as the beautiful Utopian vision of a solitary poet holding tight to his small digital camera.

Chapter Six

Epilogue: Intimate Lighting

Not east
not west
not north
not south
only this spot I am standing on
now
Abbas Kiarostami

The model of an *aggiornato* neo-realism, symbol of the best humanist tradition of the Seventh Art, icon of modern cinema: the work of Abbas Kiarostami seems to defy any generally agreed definition. The question that *Cahiers du Cinéma* used as the title for its famous monographic dossier about the Iranian film-maker, 'Who are you, Mr Kiarostami?', is still relevant today and just as open to argument. Attempts to assign him to one

aesthetic or ideological trend or another, to place his work within a recognizable and identifiable framework, in short, to account for his incredibly fertile film-making career increasingly meet with the stumbling block of the growing diversity of his latest films and the (apparently) chameleon-like personality that the director is revealing little by little. Writers have spilt rivers of ink on the subject of Kiarostami's debt to Rossellini – writers who concentrated solely on *Life and Nothing More* ... and were virtually ignorant of many of his previous films – and then along came *Through the Olive Trees* and of course *Taste of Cherry*, invalidating many of the hasty judgements made up until that point. The excessive insistence on considering Kiarostami's films from a modernist perspective, based above all on *Through the Olive Trees*, also drained the strength from most of its arguments in the light of subsequent films, although the self-referential element in the director's work has always been apparent. When some critics had already coined such picturesque expressions as 'post-modern neo-realism' to explain the special nature of Kiarostami's films,[1] *The Wind Will Carry Us* and *Ten* began to explore new areas that challenge such definitions. Gone is any trace of the cheerful and optimistic humanism that some thought they had identified in the Kiarostami of the early 1990s ...

At this stage it is hardly necessary to remind ourselves that Kiarostami has always kept his distance from the neo-realist tradition, the only common feature being – apart from certain isolated techniques – a vague *zeitgeist*: 'If there is any possible similarity between my films and Italian neo-realism,' Kiarostami was already maintaining in 1992, 'it must have to do with the social and political characteristics of present-day Iran, which in some ways are similar to those of post-war Italy. But my work should not be seen as pure imitation of Italian neo-realism: imitation in film-making is not something that interests me at all, because I think it always involves the risk of producing something very artificial.'[2] And in a later interview, when he was asked whether he considered himself to be a realist director, he answered: 'No. And in fact I reject all the 'isms' *en masse*. Including the term 'humanism' that some people use about my films: the truth is that I think my films

are not humanist at all.'[3] In a convincing argument, Fergus Daly thoroughly deconstructs the myth of Kiarostami's neo-realism and humanism (apart from certain superficial details, clearly), in order to relate his films, in particular *Close-Up* and *Through the Olive Trees*, to the most vigorous post-modernist trends in contemporary film-making.[4] Written in early 1998, Daly's text does not take into account the new developments introduced in *Taste of Cherry*, but it undoubtedly presents a good counterpoint to the critical *corpus* generated up to that point by Kiarostami's work and in any event it has the undeniable merit of calling into question various accepted wisdoms that at that time were being endlessly repeated.

We should not, however, take a position that focuses too much on this modernist side to Kiarostami's work; or, at least, we must take pains to clarify its precise meaning. The long-standing and widespread overuse of Western references when analyzing Kiarostami's films (Rossellini, De Sica, Olmi, Bresson, Godard, Murnau, Tati and even Eastern maestros such as Ray and Kurosawa, already victims of a similar exercise) has for a long time obscured the deep-rooted Persian influence on his films. 'Don't neglect the Iranian context or underestimate its importance', Godfrey Cheshire suggested very recently as a fundamental piece of advice in his introductory guide on how to interpret Kiarostami's work.[5] Kiarostami himself had been saying this for some time previously, but his comments fell in general on deaf ears: 'Without doubt they [my films] have very deep roots in the heart of Persian culture. Where else could they have their source?'[6] While it is true, as Marco Dalla Gassa maintains, that the device of repetition, the penchant for digression, the frequent display of the film-making process, the mixing up of different layers of reality and the repeated use of open endings are some of the stylistic features that characterize most of Kiarostami's films,[7] commonly defined as self-referential or self-reflexive, these do not necessarily have to spring from Western post-modernism. For the Iranian critic and essayist Mir-Ahmad-e Mir-Ehsan, 'Kiarostami is the inheritor of an eastern art tradition which foregrounds deconstruction and multiple-narration, features most notable expressed in *Close-Up*. This magical terrain is the real source of his fascination with non-

linearity and multi-spatial narration, not the French and German New Waves [... On the other hand], Persian miniature painting offers a compelling conceptual handle on Kiarostami. Hidden meanings, symbolic iconography and intertextuality are mediating mechanisms by which the private and public spheres are regulated'.[8] Mir-Ehsan's insights are developed in more detail in Sylvie Rollet's splendid article, which thoroughly explores these issues. Interested by the explanation of the 'modernist' nature of Kiarostami's films, Rollet asks: 'Should we complacently analyze the work of such a genuinely Iranian film-maker using a concept of "modernity" which is so markedly Western? Would it not be more appropriate to explore the pictorial and musical tradition that Kiarostami is heir to? Perhaps then we would discover that his rejection of the naturalistic codes of representation and his return to the use of symbols rather than simulations are not so much the sign of a rupture as of a legacy.'[9]

Referring to the well-known aversion of Islamic art towards the use of human figures and its corresponding preference for calligraphy and ornamentation,[10] Rollet points out how 'this "ornamental" mode removes any kind of referential aspect and puts the emphasis instead on indecision and uncertainty'.[11] This 'uncertainty principle', which, according to Laura Mulvey, characterizes Kiarostami's aesthetic and poetic approach,[12] is therefore in fact firmly anchored in Iranian culture, endowing his films with a level of abstraction comparable to that of miniatures, that great branch of the plastic arts of classical Persia. Here is the real *locus* of a self-sufficient world in which diverse elements are mixed (interior and exterior; past, present and future), elements that we in the West have always tended to consider as separate and yet which Kiarostami, surprisingly, seems to manage to reproduce in the essentially different medium of cinema.[13] For our purposes it is not necessary to reconstruct in any detail Sylvie Rollet's argument, which she extends to other aspects of Kiarostami's style (and which of course varies in its relevance depending on the film), but it is certainly appropriate to emphasize that the self-referentiality of his films is plural and culturally determined. Nothing could be further from Kiarostami's intentions than the use of this reflexivity as a playful exercise in mannerism or a simple film

buff's memory game: if anything lies behind the habitual use of these devices, it is a profound philosophical concern with the meaning of appearances and, consequently, a reflection on the cinema's potential to reconstitute a deeper reality by means of its 'lies'.[14]

However, it would be a mistake to think that Kiarostami made profound theoretical reflections before embarking on film-making. As he himself has explained at various points during his career, he has a deeply intuitive attitude in which particular sources of inspiration play a major part: 'My approach to cinema is according to the situation that exists. This is a spontaneous process and I have not thought of it in advance.'[15] And elsewhere he adds: 'I don't start with any theory in mind. I work in a completely instinctive way, and I wouldn't know how else to do it. But I am firmly convinced that today's film-maker must question himself about images, and not just produce them.'[16] Kiarostami's films are thus governed by strict ethics about the seeing and capturing of those images that are so often circulated, like mere products in a standardized audiovisual supermarket, which we all leave carrying a bag of the same goods.[17] Alain Bergala's idea of 're-education of the gaze' makes perfect sense when applied to the whole Kiarostami *corpus* – it takes different forms on different occasions, but there is always the common denominator of rescuing audiences from the intellectual and emotional servitude foisted on them by Hollywood, with the overwhelming power of its storytelling machine.[18]

Kiarostami's commitment to indeterminacy and uncertainty should not be mistaken, however, for inscrutability. As Gilberto Perez maintains, 'there is nothing pretentious or abstruse about Kiarostami's films. They are unaffected and uncomplicated; they make no such demands on their audience as would divide the knowing from the unknowing'.[19] If indeed Kiarostami's films divide their audiences, it would in any case be a division between those who have enough patience and those who don't. Fragmenting and withholding information, embarking on unexpected diversions, exploring and exploiting the expressive possibilities of repetition to the utmost and using any other means at his disposal to bring about a 'distancing' between the film and the audience, Kiarostami

aims to achieve a creative collaboration with an attentive audience. This 'distancing', by the way, has its equivalent in the Persian artistic tradition: the *tazieh* or ritualized religious theatre, although essentially removed from the director's concerns, nevertheless displays this aspect, which is extraordinarily similar to some of the devices used in his films.[20] Kiarostami's fundamental purpose, therefore, is to make the audience participate in his films: films that are for this very reason 'incomplete' and which only in this way can hope to come close to the elusive mystery of poetry.[21]

It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of poetry in the life and work of Abbas Kiarostami, not only because he himself has now had his own poems published – recently translated into Italian, English and French[22] – but also because throughout his life, poetry has been a constant and inexhaustible source of pleasure, comfort and inspiration. 'In my library the novels and the books of short stories seem still new, because, once I have read them, I have never opened them again. The books of poetry, on the other hand, are all the time around, quite shabby, because I am continually rereading them.'[23] It is not difficult to guess the reason for this, but in any case Kiarostami has been kind enough to expand on the subject: 'At times of conflict and anxiety, poetry is one of the few things that can give us a degree of certainty, provide us with a little happiness. I know of nothing apart from poetry that can do this. All through my life I have constantly taken refuge in poetry. In my opinion, poetry is much more helpful in times of difficulty than in times of calm; it enables us to find a certain stability, an internal energy. When religion cannot fill this void, poetry can do so.'[24] Elaine Sciolino is probably right when she says that 'poetry for Iranians is religion, a religion as powerful as Islam',[25] and certainly in the case of Kiarostami this comment seems indisputably appropriate.

Kiarostami himself has repeatedly insisted on the exceptional importance of poetry in Iran, even among the most deprived and illiterate: 'Poetry constitutes the spoken language of the Iranian people; not perhaps for the younger generation, but certainly for all the preceding generations. There are many illiterate people who can nevertheless recite the poems of one poet or another.'[26] This

claim is in fact very relevant. Although the cinema has obviously become the most popular form of art and culture among young Iranians of the present day, for Kiarostami's generation poetry was still a major part of their development, one of the forces driving the intellectual renewal of the country and even one of the most powerful and symbolic weapons against the dictatorship of the Shah. It is therefore perfectly logical to expect to find a poetical base, a source of nutrition that is essentially lyrical, in the work of Kiarostami and the other leading film-makers of his generation. Mohsen Makhmalbaf explains it very well: 'If behind every European film-maker we tend to see a painter, behind an Iranian film-maker there is always a frustrated poet or an unhappy troubadour. Poetry in particular represents for us the very essence of classical art.'[27] Put another way, it is 'poetic language that completely dominates the cultural world of Iran, rather than images';[28] it is 'Persian poetry that nourishes and guides the visual thinking' of this country,[29] as much today as in times long past, and this is why it would be difficult to overemphasize its relevance to any cinematographic analysis, particularly where – as in the case of Kiarostami – its presence becomes obvious and constantly demands our attention.

Kiarostami's admiration for Omar Khayyam, Hafez, Jalaluddin Rumi and many other great classical Persian poets and the significant influence of their poetry on the director's films are already well-known. Kiarostami undoubtedly finds in these poems, beyond their excellent literary virtues, an intellectual and spiritual affinity that is characterized above all by 'a philosophy where the real Islam is synonymous with tolerance and the acceptance of others', in the name of which puritanism, hypocrisy and despotism are utterly rejected.[30] However, as an artist and writer, Kiarostami is hardly a traditionalist, and in fact his poetry has an undeniably modernist feel to it,[31] which links him strongly to the Iranian *Shaer-e nou* (new poetry) movement started by Nima Yushij and developed by figures such as Ahmad Shamlu, Sohrab Sepehri, Forugh Farrokhzad and Mehdi Akhavan-Saless, all of whom are directly quoted by the director at one time or another.[32] Kiarostami's poetry has quite reasonably been compared to the *haiku* because of its formal

structure and essentially visual nature,[33] or even (keeping it within the Persian tradition and less convincingly) to the *shatkhiyat* of the Sufi tradition.[34] These possible connections aside, the spirit and inspiration of Kiarostami's poems are essentially rooted in Iranian modernist poetry. We have already explored his close affinity with the world of Forugh Farrokhzad and, above all, Sohrab Sepehri, and in this sense Godfrey Cheshire's opinion cannot be considered overstated at all: 'If you wanted to reduce Kiarostami to a single idea, you would be not far wrong in saying that he has spent his career developing a cinematic equivalent of Iranian modernist poetry.'[35]

Given the essentially visual nature of Kiarostami's poetry, unusual images (like 'nocturnal scribbles, very private', to use his own words) that he had been jotting down for three years with no intention that they would ever see the light of day,[36] it is not surprising to find numerous and profound parallels with many of the shots in his films and of course with his photographs. But it is not the painstaking trawl for these similarities – something that has in any case already been carried out by Riccardo Zipoli[37] – that really provides the key to understanding the poetic seam underlying his film work, nor his affinity with the above-mentioned authors. We are dealing, rather, with a particular vision of the world. Hamid Dabashi, heavily influenced by having just watched *Through the Olive Trees* (at that time the most recent Kiarostami film), carried out a meticulous comparison between the film and the work of Sepehri, and came to the conclusion that Kiarostami's films are 'a Dionysian celebration of life'.[38] This opinion is just as debatable as his attempt to characterize the director as a guileless optimist, retreating into nature as an escape from the failure of history.[39] Dabashi's interpretation irresponsibly takes the part to be the whole (*Through the Olive Trees* compared to the rest of Kiarostami's film work) and looks only at the element of gaiety and sensuality that occasionally appears on the surface, like the tip of an iceberg, which is much more complex and difficult to see.

As Cioran, a philosopher apparently well-known to Kiarostami, quite justly observed, 'a pessimist has to think up new reasons every day for staying alive: he is a victim of the "meaning" of life'.[40] For Kiarostami, as for Omar Khayyam or Forugh Farrokhzad, sensualism

and pessimism are opposite sides of the same coin. As with Sepehri, taking refuge in nature has more to do with disillusion than with a joyful return to Arcadia. Also like Sepehri, and here Dabashi is perfectly right, Kiarostami has a deep dislike for everyday reality, for the world he sees and in which he lives: it follows that 'they both deliberately regress to an irreducible as a narrative strategy to subvert the configuration of reality they dislike',[41] an attitude that at first sight could be mistakenly seen as a mere escape from any kind of commitment. Dabashi appeals to the assumptions of 'weak thinking' to establish certain parallels with Kiarostami's *modus operandi*,[42] but other critics have gone even further and detected a certain Nietzschean stamp in his rigorous and persistent questioning of all absolute truth and likewise in his determined appeal for the old values to be replaced with new through the medium of art.[43] Kiarostami expresses himself in the following way: 'In my opinion, cinema and all the other arts ought to be able to destroy the mind of their audience in order to reject the old values and make it susceptible to new values.'[44] This is quite a project – 'we need to rinse our eyes and view everything in a different light'[45] – and one that Kiarostami's films have in fact been carrying out for thirty years now, despite the fact that short-sighted critics and audiences still persist in seeing them as apolitical and non-ideological.

While it is true that Kiarostami invariably takes up a position that is 'on this side of history', as Ishaghpour so well puts it,[46] and it is quite certain that he abhors politics and theology in their usual forms, it is equally true that all his films are shot through and through with a radical desire to shatter convention, which is another link, aesthetically and ideologically, with Sepehri and the best exponents of the *Shaer-e nou* (new poetry). When he was asked recently whether he really thought that art should inspire in the spectator a desire to enter a different reality, Kiarostami replied emphatically: 'Yes, I believe so, because otherwise art would have no purpose. Should religion not prove successful at accomplishing that mission, art always can attempt it. They both point in the same direction. Religion points to another world, whereas art points to a better existence. One is an invitation, an offering to a faraway place,

the other to a place that is close.'[47] The fact is that the director has given his opinions frequently and explicitly about the nature of art and its function within society, and is quick to deny the repeated accusations of being half-hearted in his civic and political stance.[48] When *Life and Nothing More ...* was first screened, he was already explaining his point of view: 'I think it is wrong for any one person, be they artist or politician, to decide for everybody. In my opinion, the work of an artist consists solely in presenting issues, and it is each individual's responsibility to think about them. In a country like Iran, people don't just want their artists to show the issues, they want them to resolve them. But it is not the artist's function to resolve issues.'[49]

Kiarostami has always maintained an apparently ambiguous stance about the political nature of his films, rejecting each and every demand of conventional political films, while still upholding his more profound commitment to transform reality. In one of his typical pronouncements on the subject he said: 'Well, I'm not political in the sense of belonging to any political party or leading a revolutionary charge, wanting to overthrow anyone. I don't work for anyone. But if you mean by political that you talk about today's human problems, then for sure my work is political and even strongly so [...] When you get involved in someone else's suffering, and you try to convey it so that other people can feel it and understand, then this is political.'[50] As though he were echoing Gilles Deleuze's thoughts on the matter (which is in fact unlikely), Kiarostami seems to advocate a more indirect conception of political cinema, a first-person cinema where 'the people are missing', but instead the film-maker becomes, in just one person, 'a genuine collective agent, a collective fermenting agent, a catalyst'.[51]

'I think I fall into the category of artists who create their work from within themselves',[52] says Kiarostami. There can be little doubt that this is so. But this 'internal exile' described by Ishaghpour is not by any means an abdication, and Kiarostami has always, right from his earliest films, created a subtle but effective political discourse on the world around him, and a reality that he finds distressing.[53] Life and liberty as inalienable rights of the individual, whatever the situation or circumstances, emerge as a powerful leitmotif in

Kiarostami's films,[54] which are, as we have seen, full of significant examples and exponents of this conception of life as a series of personal choices, superseding any kind of norms, rules or decrees. That is why Kiarostami's films are, above all, about tolerance. 'It is thanks to their own vision/understanding that others have become my friends',[55] Kiarostami is fond of saying, quoting a verse by Rumi.

In common with many other artists, intellectuals and ordinary Iranian citizens, Kiarostami undoubtedly pinned his hopes on the reforms promised by Mohammad Khatami on his election as President of the Islamic Republic in May 1997, but his scepticism appears to be increasing. Abandoning his proverbial caution and his refusal to discuss these issues with the foreign press,[56] the director has made more and more comments on the subject in recent years, and, in tune with the disillusionment felt among many sections of Iranian society, he has been outspoken in his criticisms of the half-hearted reforms undertaken and the fierce opposition of the more conservative factions of the regime: 'We have not yet experienced these new reforms and openness; we've only heard news of them. In practice I believe that everything is like it was before, but there is this kind of hope.'[57] In July 1999, when student demonstrations broke out spontaneously in the streets of Tehran in protest at the closure of the progressive daily newspaper *Salam* and demanding the right of free expression, Kiarostami gave *La Repubblica* his thoughts on the events: 'I have also been to see with my own eyes what is happening at the University of Tehran, and I noticed one thing in particular: the movement is basically made up of young people who are the same age as the revolution, who are what we might call the children of the revolution. Their demands are legitimately based on that fact. I look at their faces and I see young people who have no future, no work, not even a past. They want to know why they have been ignored for twenty years, and what it is that the government can offer them now. They have more than sufficient reason to voice their discontent. It is time for the government to stop covering its ears and listen to them. Its own survival depends on it.'[58]

So, midway between hope and disappointment, Kiarostami continues his coherent and highly individual film-making

discourse. 'I think that we Iranians have no choice but to continue the struggle to improve our own existence, as does anyone who is in danger of dying and who clings on to life to the bitter end.'[59] Almost certainly, his films will continue to demonstrate a strong commitment to this task, writing a new chapter in this eventful story of vigorous survival and firm protest, in which we can hardly expect Kiarostami to be particularly optimistic. But he will undoubtedly continue on his chosen path, bearing in mind, like the protagonist of *Ten*, that 'unfortunately sometimes you lose'...

CHAPTER SEVEN

Filmography

1970
Nan va kuche / Bread and Alley

Production: Kanun-e Parvaresh-e Fekri Kukadan va Nujavanan (Centre for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults). *Screenplay*: Taghi Kiarostami. *Photography*: Mehrdad Fakhimi (b&w). *Editing*: Manuchehr Oliai. *Sound*: Harayer Ateshkar. *Assistant director*: Arapik Baghdasarian. *Cast*: Reza Hashemi, Mehdi Shahrvanfar. *Format*: 35mm. *Running time*: 11 minutes. *Synopsis*: Returning from an errand to buy bread, a boy finds a menacing dog blocking his way through the alley he must go down to get home. Frightened by the dog's barking, he asks various passers-by for help but no-one pays him any attention, and he must find a solution all by himself: he throws the dog a piece of bread and, while the animal is devouring it, he continues on his way home.

1972
Zang-e tafrih / Breaktime

Production: Kanun-e Parvaresh-e Fekri Kukadan va Nujavanan.

Screenplay: Abbas Kiarostami, based on a story by Massud Madani. *Photography*: Ali Reza Zarrindast and Morteza Rastegar (b&w). *Editing*: Ruhollah Emami. *Sound*: Harayer Ateshkar. *Assistant director*: Mostafa Keypur. *Cast*: Sirus Hassanpur (Dara). *Format*: 35mm. *Running time*: 14 minutes. *Synopsis*: When the breaktime bell rings, young Dara leaves school; he has been sent home as a punishment for breaking a window with his football. On his way home he comes across some other boys playing a game of football, and cannot resist joining in; he ends up by annoying them, and they chase him away. Dara gets lost and tries to find his way home through unknown streets, which lead him to the outskirts of the city.

1973
Tajrobe / The Experience

Production: Kanun-e Parvaresh-e Fekri Kukadan va Nujavanan. *Screenplay*: Abbas Kiarostami and Amir Naderi based on a story by Amir Naderi. *Photography*: Ali Reza Zarrindast (b&w). *Editing*: Mehdi Rejaian. *Sound*: Harayer Ateshkar. *Cast*: Hossein Yar Mohammadi (Mamad), Andre Gwalovich (the photographer), Parviz Naderi, Mostafa Tari, Firuzeh Habibi, Kamal Ramzani, Behruz Adriun, Morteza Said, Sirus Kakhaki, Shirin Razvan, Aziz Talebi. *Format*: 35mm. *Running time*: 56 minutes. *Synopsis*: Mamad, an orphaned teenager, works as a messenger boy in a photographic studio, where he also sleeps at night. He falls platonically in love with a girl from a wealthier class; one day, thinking he sees her smiling at him, he decides to go to her house and ask for a job as a servant, so that he can be closer to her. But he receives only a decisive refusal.

1974
Mosafer / The Traveller

Production: Kanun-e Parvaresh-e Fekri Kukadan va Nujavanan. *Screenplay*: Abbas Kiarostami, based on a story by Hassan Rafii. *Photography*: Firuz Malekzadeh (b&w). *Editing*: Amir Hossein

Hami. *Music*: Kambiz Roshanravan. *Sound*: Harayer Ateshkar. *Cast*: Hassan Darabi (Ghassem), Massud Zandbegleh (Akbar), Mostafa Tari, Hassan Arab, Sahar Zandbegleh. *Format*: 35mm. *Running time*: 71 minutes. *Synopsis*: Ghassem has problems at school and at home, because he is interested only in football. When the national team is about to play in Tehran, Ghassem decides to run away from home to go to the capital and see the match. To do this he has to lie to his parents and friends, and travel overnight in a long-distance bus. Once inside the stadium, overcome with fatigue, he lies down and takes a nap while waiting for the match to start; when he wakes up, he discovers that it finished some time ago.

1975

Do rah-e hal baray-e yek masale / Two Solutions for One Problem

Production: Ali Asghar Mirzai for Kanun-e Parvaresh-e Fekri Kukadan va Nujavanan. *Screenplay*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Photography*: Morteza Rastegar (colour). *Editing*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Sound*: Changiz Sayad. *Assistant director*: Mostafa Haji. *Cast*: Said Jarrahi Alamdari (Dara), Hamid Jarrahi Alamdari (Nader). *Format*: 35mm. *Running time*: 5 minutes. *Synopsis*: During breaktime, Dara and Nader have a fierce argument about a torn exercise book that the former has given back to the latter. There are two possible outcomes, which the film shows one after the other. One is that Dara wants to get his own back, and the two boys start a violent fight; the other is that they work together to mend the exercise book with a little glue.

Manam mitunam / So Can I

Production: Ali Asghar Mirzai for Kanun-e Parvaresh-e Fekri Kukadan va Nujavanan. *Screenplay*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Photography*: Mostafa Haji (col.). *Editing*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Music*: Nasser Cheshmazar. *Sound*: Harayer Ateshkar and Mohammad Haghighi. *Animation*: Nafiseh Reyhani and Farzaneh Taghavi. *Cast*: Kamal Riahi, Ahmad Kiarostami. *Format*: 35mm. *Running time*: 4 minutes. *Synopsis*: Two boys watch a cartoon film about various kinds of animals and one

of them claims repeatedly that he can do the same things he sees the animals doing. But then the sight of birds flying plunges him into confusion: the film ends with the shot of an aeroplane circling the skies overhead.

1976

Rangha / The Colours

Production: Ali Asghar Mirzai for Kanun-e Parvaresh-e Fekri Kukadan va Nujavanan. *Screenplay*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Photography*: Morteza Rastegar and Mostafa Haji (col.). *Editing*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Music*: Nasser Cheshmazar. *Sound*: Changiz Sayad. *Cast*: Shahin Amir-Arjomand. *Format*: 16mm. *Running time*: 15 minutes. *Synopsis*: By showing a series of different-coloured objects, the film aims to familiarize very young children with the various colours, and ends with a shot of a blackboard, a symbol of learning.

Lebas-i baray-e arusi / A Suit for the Wedding

Production: Ebrahim Foruzesh for Kanun-e Parvaresh-e Fekri Kukadan va Nujavanan. *Screenplay*: Abbas Kiarostami and Parviz Davai. *Photography*: Firuz Malekzadeh (col.). *Editing*: Musa Afshar. *Sound*: Changiz Sayad. *Assistant director*: Ahmad Mirshekari. *Cast*: Mohammad Fassih Motaleb, Massud Zandbegleh, Mehdi Nekui, Reza Hashemi, Babak Kazemi, Mohammad Bagher Tavakoli, Hashem Arkan, Iraj Zehtab, Turan Sehatbakhsh, Azarmidokht Matinnezhad, Morteza Kakhki, Rasul Neiziri. *Format*: 35mm. *Running time*: 53 minutes. *Synopsis*: A woman orders a suit from a tailor for her young son to wear to her sister's wedding. The tailor's apprentice, together with two other teenage boys who work in the same building, devise a plan to try on the suit at night to see what it feels like. Things get a little complicated but in the morning, at the last possible minute, they manage to return the suit to its proper place.

1977

Bozorgdasht-e moallem / Tribute to the Teachers

Production: Kanun-e Parvaresh-e Fekri Kukadan va Nujavanan. *Screenplay*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Photography*: Mohammad Haghighi (col.). *Editing*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Format*: 16mm. *Running time*: 23 minutes. *Synopsis*: By means of various interviews with different schoolteachers, the film pays tribute to the teaching profession.

Rang-zani / Painting

[Episode of the series *Az oghat-e faraghat-e khod cheguneh estefade konim?* (How Should we Make Use of our Leisure Time?)]
Production: Ali Asghar Mirzai for Kanun-e Parvaresh-e Fekri Kukadan va Nujavanan. *Screenplay*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Editing*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Format*: 16mm. *Running time*: 7 minutes. *Synopsis*: An educational film that aims to instil a love of painting in young children.

Kakh-e Jahan-Nama / Jahan-Nama Palace

Production: Ali Asghar Mirzai for Kanun-e Parvaresh-e Fekri Kukadan va Nujavanan. *Screenplay:* Abbas Kiarostami. *Photography*: Firuz Malekzadeh (b&w). *Editing*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Sound*: Changiz Sayad. Cast: Manijeh Torfeh, Manuchehr Anvar. *Format*: 35mm. *Running time*: 30 minutes. *Synopsis*: The palace of Jahan-Nama, one of the Shah's traditional residences, was completely restored during the 1970s: the film documents this process.

Gozaresh / The Report

Production: Bahman Farmanara for Sherkat-e Gostaresh-e Jadamat-e Sinema-y Iran (Society for the Development of Iranian Cinema). *Screenplay*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Photography*: Ali Reza Zarrindast (col.). *Editing*: Mahtalat Mirfenderski. *Art direction*: Ahmad Mirshekari. *Sound*: Yussef Shahab. *Cast*: Kurosh Afshar (Mahmad Firuzkui), Shohreh Aghdashlu (Azam Firuzkui), Mostafa Tari, Mehdi Montazer, Mohammad Bagher Tavakoli, Ashem Arkan,

Behnush Rodpur, Tahnaz Esmaeli. *Format*: 35mm. *Running time*: 105 minutes. *Synopsis*: A civil servant at the Ministry of Finance, Mahmad Firuzkui, is accused of taking bribes, at the same time as his marriage is crumbling and his wife is threatening to leave him. After a violent argument, she tries to commit suicide and he rushes her to hospital, where the doctors tell him that she will survive.

1978

Rah-e hal yek / Solution No. 1

Production: Ali Asghar Mirzai for Kanun-e Parvaresh-e Fekri Kukadan va Nujavanan. *Screenplay*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Photography*: Firuz Malekzadeh (col.). *Editing*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Sound*: Changiz Sayad. *Format*: 16mm. *Running time*: 11 minutes. *Synopsis*: A man has gone in search of a spare wheel for his car, which has broken down in a remote mountain area. When he cannot find anyone to give him a lift back to his car, he starts to walk, pushing the wheel in front of him. But the wheel starts rolling apparently all by itself back to the car, and all he has to do is follow it ...

1979

Ghazie-ye shekl-e avval, ghazie-ye shekl-e dovvom / First Case, Second Case

Production: Kanun-e Parvaresh-e Fekri Kukadan va Nujavanan. *Screenplay*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Photography*: Hushang Baharlu (col.). *Editing*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Sound*: Changiz Sayad. *Assistant director*: Nasser Zeraati. *Format*: 16mm. *Running time*: 53 minutes. *Synopsis*: A simple incident at school is analyzed by various educational experts and prominent figures from community and political life, displaying their differing attitudes.

1980

Dandan-e dard / Toothache

Production: Kanun-e Parvaresh-e Fekri Kukadan va Nujavanan. *Screenplay*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Photography*: Firuz Malekzadeh (col.).

Editing: Abbas Kiarostami. *Sound*: Changiz Sayad. *Animation*: Mehdi Samakar and Abdollah Alimorad. *Cast*: Jamshid Parvizian. *Format*: 16mm. *Running time*: 24 minutes. *Synopsis*: Because he has not cleaned his teeth regularly, a boy has severe toothache and his parents take him to the dentist, who not only treats him but also explains to the camera the importance of dental hygiene.

1981

Be tartib ya bedun-e tartib? / Orderly or Disorderly?

Production: Ali Asghar Mirzai for Kanun-e Parvaresh-e Fekri Kukadan va Nujavanan. *Screenplay*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Photography*: Iraj Safavi (col.). *Editing*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Sound*: Changiz Sayad. *Special effects:* Mehdi Samakar. *Format*: 35mm. *Running time*: 16 minutes. *Synopsis*: Using a simple comparison of different situations, the film encourages children to think about the advantages of order versus disorder. However, the shooting of the film runs into problems and the film crew end up being unable to film a particular sequence in an 'orderly' way.

1982

Hamsorayan / The Chorus

Production: Kanun-e Parvaresh-e Fekri Kukadan va Nujavanan. *Screenplay*: Abbas Kiarostami, based on a story by Mohammad Javad Kahnamoi. *Photography*: Ali Reza Zarrindast (col.). *Editing*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Sound*: Ahmad Asghari and Changiz Sayad. *Assistant director:* Nasser Zeraati. *Cast*: Yussef Moghaddam, Ali Asghari. *Format*: 35mm. *Running time*: 17 minutes. *Synopsis*: Irritated by the noise in the street, an old man turns off his hearing aid during his morning walk and leaves it off when he gets home. When his granddaughters arrive home from school, they knock on the door but he doesn't hear them; only with the help of their friends, who stand outside shouting in front of the house, do they manage to make him realize they are home.

1983

Hamshahri / Fellow Citizen

Production: Kanun-e Parvaresh-e Fekri Kukadan va Nujavanan. *Screenplay*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Photography*: Firuz Malekzadeh (col.). *Editing*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Sound*: Mohammad Haghighi. *Assistant director:* Ali Baveri. *Cast*: Reza Mansuri (the traffic policeman). *Format*: 16mm. *Running time*: 52 minutes. *Synopsis*: When the Tehran city council closes an area of the city centre to traffic, dozens of drivers try to convince the traffic policeman on duty to let them through, using a wide variety of arguments.

1984

Tars va suezan / Fear and Suspicion

Production: Seda va Sima-ye Jomhuri-ye Eslami-e Iran (Voice and Vision of the Islamic Republic). *Screenplay*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Running time*: 13 episodes (45 minutes each) were planned, but only one or two were filmed. *Synopsis*: Each episode consists of a separate fictional story, invariably involving feelings of fear and suspicion, which is then discussed by a group of people and a psychologist.

1985

Avaliha / First Graders

Production: Kanun-e Parvaresh-e Fekri Kukadan va Nujavanan. *Screenplay*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Photography*: Homayun Payvar (col.). *Editing*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Sound*: Changiz Sayad. *Cast*: Mohammad Dadras, students, teachers and staff at the Tohid School. *Format*: 16mm. *Running time*: 84 minutes. *Synopsis*: The film shows the first day of school for a class of first-graders, paying particular attention to the visits of the naughtiest children to the headmaster's office to be reprimanded.

1987

Khane-ye dust kojast? / Where Is the Friend's House?

Production: Ali Reza Zarrin for Kanun-e Parvaresh-e Fekri Kukadan

va Nujavanan. *Screenplay*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Photography*: Farhad Saba (col.). *Editing*: Naamet Allah Alizadeh and Abbas Kiarostami. *Music*: Amin Allah Hossein. *Art direction*: Reza Nami. *Sound*: Jahangir Mirshekari, Asghar Shahverdi and Behruz Moavenian. *Assistant director*: Kiumarsh Purahmad. *Cast*: Babak Ahmadpur (Ahmad), Ahmad Ahmadpur (Mohammad Reza Nematzadeh), Khodabakhsh Defai (the teacher), Mohammad Hossein Ruhi (the carpenter), Iran Otari (the mother), Ayat Ansari (the father), Rafia Difai (the grandfather), Sedigheh Tohidi (the woman neighbour), Peiman Mohafi (the neighbour), Farhang Akhavan, Tayebeh Soleimani, Mohammad Reza Parvaneh, Aziz Babai, Nader Ghulami, Akbar Muradi. *Format*: 35mm. *Running time*: 83 minutes. *Synopsis*: Ahmad takes home by mistake the exercise book belonging to his classmate, Mohammad Reza, whom the teacher has threatened to expel if he fails once more to do his homework, and Ahmad runs off to a neighbouring village to give it back to him. After various adventures, but not having been able to find the right house, at night Ahmad does double his share of homework and thus saves Mohammad Reza from punishment the following day.

1989

Mashq-e shab / Homework

Production: Ali Reza Zarrin for Kanun-e Parvaresh-e Fekri Kukadan va Nujavanan. *Screenplay*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Fotografía*: Iraj Safavi and Ali Asghar Mirzai (col.). *Editing*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Music*: Mohammad Reza Aligholi. *Sound*: Ahmad Asghari. *Cast*: Students and teachers at the Shahid Massumi School. *Format*: 16mm. *Running time*: 86 minutes. *Synopsis*: Intended as an investigation of children's problems with homework, the film interviews various children to discover their opinions and ideas, while at the same time presenting a very accurate portrait of the state of primary education in contemporary Iran.

1990

Klozap / Namay-e nazdik / Close-Up

Production: Ali Reza Zarrin for Kanun-e Parvaresh-e Fekri Kukadan va Nujavanan. *Screenplay*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Photography*: Ali Reza Zarrindast (col.). *Editing*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Sound*: Mohammad Haghighi, Ahmad Asghari, Hassan Zahedi and Jahangir Mirshekari. *Cast*: Hossein Sabzian, Hassan Farazmand, Abolfazl Ahankhah, Mehrdad Ahankhah, Nayer Mohseni Zonuzi, Ahmad Reza Moayed Mohseni, Mohsen Makhmalbaf, Manuchehr Ahankhah, Hushang Shahai, Mahrokh Ahankhah, Mohammad Ali Barrati, Davud Gudarzi, Haj Ali Reza Ahmadi, Abbas Kiarostami. *Format*: 35mm. *Running time*: 90 minutes. *Synopsis*: Having read in the press that a man has, for unknown reasons, impersonated the film-maker Mohsen Makhmalbaf, Kiarostami decides to investigate the case, filming the trial and subsequently reconstructing the whole story for the cameras.

1992

Zendegi va digar hich / Life and Nothing More ...

Production: Ali Reza Zarrin for Kanun-e Parvaresh-e Fekri Kukadan va Nujavanan. *Screenplay*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Photography*: Homayun Payvar (col.). *Editing*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Music:* 'Concert for Two Horns' by Antonio Vivaldi. *Sound*: Hassan Zahedi y Behruz Abedini. *Art direction*: Farhad Mehranfar. *Assistant directors*: Hassan Agha Karimi, Bahram Kadami y Ali Reza Akbari. *Cast*: Farhad Kheradmand (the film-maker), Puya Payvar (Puya), Hossein Rezai (Hossein), Farkhondeh Feyzi, Moharram Feyzi, Behruz Abedini, Ziya Babai, Mohammad Hossein Ruhi, Hossein Khadem, Massumeh Parvaneh, Mohammad Reza Parvaneh, Shehrbanu Shafahi, Mohammad Bezdani, Mohammad Hassanpur, Farhad Kadimi, Mahbanu Darabi, Leila Noruzi. *Format*: 35mm. *Running time*: 91 minutes. *Synopsis*: Following a severe earthquake that hit northern Iran in 1990, a director and his young son travel to the disaster zone to try to find two boys who had appeared in a previous

film by the director. Although they do not manage to find them, it turns out to be an extraordinarily profound experience for both of them, entering a world of which up till then they had had only the vaguest knowledge.

1994

Zir-e derakhtan-e zeytun / Through the Olive Trees

Production: Abbas Kiarostami. *Screenplay*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Photography*: Hossein Jafarian and Farhad Saba (col.). *Editing*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Music:* Amir Farshid Rahiman and 'Concert for Oboe and Violins' by Domenico Cimarosa. *Art direction*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Sound*: Mahmud Samakbashi, Yadollah Nayafi and Hossein Moradi. *Assistant director*: Jafar Panahi. *Cast*: Hossein Rezai (Hossein), Tahereh Ladanian (Tahereh), Mohammad Ali Keshavarz (the film-maker), Farhad Kheradmand (Farhad), Zarifeh Shiva (Mrs Shiva), Mahbanu Darabi, Zahra Noruzi, Barastu Abbasi, Nasret Betri, Azim Aziznia, Astaduli Babani, Khodabakhsh Defai, Naya Bursadiki, Babak Ahmadpur, Ahmad Ahmadpur. *Format*: 35mm. *Running time*: 103 minutes. *Synopsis*: While shooting a film in an area devastated by a massive earthquake, the director realizes that Hossein, the young man he has chosen to play one of the parts, is in real life in love with Tahereh, the girl who plays his wife. Hossein makes the most of every second of the shoot to woo the girl in the hope that in the end she will overcome the opposition of her family and return his love.

1995

Sham-e yeknafare / Dinner for One

[Episode of the collective film *Lumière et Compagnie* (Lumière and Company), supervised by Sarah Moon]
Production: Fabienne Servan-Schreiber, Neal Edelstein, Angel Amigo and Soren Staermose for Cinétévé/La Sept-Arte/Igeldo Komunikazioa/Sören Staermose AB/Le Studio Canal Plus. *Screenplay*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Photography*: Philippe Poulet (b/

n). *Cast (voice):* Isabelle Huppert. *Format*: 35mm. *Running time*: 1 minute. *Synopsis*: A woman leaves a message for a man on an answering machine, asking to see him again, but he decides not to pick up the telephone and carries on cooking his meal.

Repérages / Locations

[Episode of the film *A propos de Nice, la suite* (About Nice: the Story Continues), co-directed by Catherine Breillat, Constantin Costa-Gavras, Claire Denis, Raymond Depardon, Pavel Lounguine and Raúl Ruiz]
Co-director: Parviz Kimiavi. *Production*: François Margolin for Margo Films/La Sept Cinéma. *Screenplay*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Photography*: Jacques Bouquin (col.). *Editing*: Anne Belin. *Sound*: Jean-Pierre Fenié. *Cast*: Parviz Kimiavi (the film-maker), Simone Lecorre (Jeannine), Christine Heinrich-Burelt (the taxi driver), Luce Vigo (Luce Vigo). *Format*: 35mm. *Running time*: 17 minutes. *Synopsis*: A film director travels to Nice to find the locations for a film tribute to the film-maker Jean Vigo.

1997

Tavalod-e nur / The Birth of Light

Production: Waka Films. *Screenplay*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Photography*: Bahman Kiarostami (col.). *Format*: Beta SP. *Running time:* 5 minutes. *Synopsis*: A single shot shows dawn breaking over the peaks of a mountain range.

Taam-e gilas / Taste of Cherry

Production: Abbas Kiarostami. *Screenplay*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Photography*: Homayun Payvar (col.). *Editing*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Music*: 'St James Infirmary' by Joe Primrose (trumpet solo: Louis Armstrong). *Art direction*: Hassan Yektapanah. *Sound*: Jahangir Mirshekari. *Assistant directors*: Hassan Yektapanah and Bahman Kiarostami. *Cast*: Homayun Ershadi (Badii), Abdolhossein Bagheri (the taxidermist), Afshin Khorshid Bakhtari (the worker), Safar-Ali

Moradi (the soldier), Mir-Hossein Nuri (the seminarian), Ahmad Ansari (the site security guard), Hamid Massumi (the man in the telephone booth), Elham Imami (the woman in front of the museum), Ahmad Jahangiri, Nasrollah Amini, Sepideh Asghari, Davud Foruzanfar, Iraj Alidust, Rahman Rezai, Hojatollah Sarkeshi, Ali Nurnajafi. *Format*: 35mm. *Running time*: 99 minutes. *Synopsis*: A man looks for someone to help him perform a mysterious task, which turns out to be none other than burying him after he has committed suicide. In the course of various encounters he hears differing objections from several people, and an old taxidermist (who needs the money that is offered to pay for medical treatment for his son) is the only person prepared to accept the task. In the middle of the night, the man goes to the place where he has chosen to kill himself and climbs into the grave, which has already been dug. This sequence is followed by some video shots of the same film being made.

1999

Bad mara khahad bord / Le Vent nous emportera / The Wind Will Carry Us

Production: Abbas Kiarostami and Marin Karmitz (MK2 Productions). *Screenplay*: Abbas Kiarostami based on a story by Mahmoud Aydin. *Photography*: Mahmoud Kalari (col.). *Editing*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Music*: Peyman Yazdanian. *Sound*: Jahangir Mirshekari and Mohammad Hassan Najm. *Art direction*: Hassan Yektapanah. *Assistant directors*: Bahman Ghobadi and Nasrin Asghari. *Cast*: Behzad Dourani (Behzad), Farzad Sohrabi (Farzad), Massoud Mansuri, Massumeh Salimi, Bahman Ghobadi, Noghreh Asadi, Ali Reza Naderi, Rushan Karam Elmi, Reihan Heydari, Lida Soltani. *Format*: 35mm. *Running time*: 118 minutes. *Synopsis*: A television crew arrives in a remote Kurdish village to film an ancient funeral ceremony. But day after day passes and the expected death does not take place, and only the head of the crew, Behzad, seems to have the necessary patience. During the long wait, Behzad wanders around the village, but he cannot escape his feelings of isolation,

and it is only when an unforeseen accident happens that he finally becomes involved in a different way with the life of the community, and rethinks his attitude.

2001

ABC Africa / ABC Africa

Production: Abbas Kiarostami and Marin Karmitz (MK2 Productions). *Screenplay*: Abbas Kiarostami based on an idea by Ramin Rafirasme. *Photography*: Seifollah Samadian (col.). *Editing*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Assistant editors:* Mohammad Razdasht and Sahand Samadian. *Sound*: Mohammad Reza Delpak. *Cast*: Abbas Kiarostami, Seifollah Samadian, Ramin Rafirasme. *Format*: DV. *Running time*: 84 minutes. *Synopsis*: In response to an invitation to make a film about the orphans of AIDS victims in Uganda, Kiarostami and a colleague travel to that country on a fact-finding trip to prepare the subsequent shooting of the documentary. But the images captured by their two digital cameras prove sufficient to put the film together.

Au travers de la fenêtre / Sleepers

Production: Abbas Kiarostami, Marin Karmitz (MK2 Productions) and Catherine Tieck (Galerie de France)/49 Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte della Biennale di Venezia. *Screenplay*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Photography*: Abbas Kiarostami (col.). *Cast*: Luna Shadzi, Charles Gillibert. *Format*: DV (video installation). *Running time*: 98 minutes. *Synopsis*: A zenithal shot shows a man and a woman sleeping on a double bed.

Ten Minutes Older

Production: Abbas Kiarostami. *Screenplay*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Photography*: Abbas Kiarostami (col.). *Format*: DV (video installation). *Running time*: 10 minutes. *Synopsis*: A zenithal shot shows a baby sleeping until, suddenly, he wakes up and begins to cry.

2002

Ten

Production: Abbas Kiarostami and Marin Karmitz (MK2 Productions). *Screenplay*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Photography*: Abbas Kiarostami (col.). *Editing*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Music*: Peyman Yazdanian and 'Walking in the Air' by Howard Blake. *Assistant editors*: Vahid Ghazi, Bahman Kiarostami, Mastaneh Mohajer and Mazdak Sepanlu. *Cast*: Mania Akbari (the mother), Amin Maher (the son), Mandana Sharbaf (the sister), Roya Arabshahi, Katayun Taleizadeh, Amene Moradi, Kamran Adl. *Format:* DV. *Running time*: 94 minutes. *Synopsis*: A young woman, divorced and remarried, has severe problems in communicating with her son, who wants to live with his father, and she is trying to find some stability in her relationship and personal life. During the course of ten different conversations inside her car, with her son but also with other women, the film explores women's lives in modern-day Iran.

2003

10 on Ten

Production: Abbas Kiarostami and Marin Karmitz (MK2 Productions). *Technical crew*: Abbas Kiarostami, Homayun Payvar, Kamyar Minukadeh, Mazdak Sepanlu and Bahman Kiarostami. *Cast*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Format*: DV. *Running time*: 87 minutes. *Synopsis*: Driving his own car, Kiarostami revisits the shooting locations of *Taste of Cherry*, and spells out his personal vision of cinema and the process of artistic creation in ten parts, inspired by the experience of his previous film, *Ten*.

Five

Production: Abbas Kiarostami, Marin Karmitz (MK2 Productions) and Makoto Ueda (NHK Enterprises). *Screenplay*: Abbas Kiarostami. *Photography*: Abbas Kiarostami (col.). *Format*: DV. *Running time*: 74 minutes. *Synopsis*: Consisting of just five separate long shots, the film – half photography, half poetry – shows five apparently trivial scenes in a beach area.

2004

Tickets

Co-directors: Ken Loach and Ermanno Olmi. *Production*: Babak Karimi, Domenico Procacci (Fandango Film) and Rebecca O'Brien (Sixteen Film). *Screenplay*: Abbas Kiarostami, Ermanno Olmi and Paul Laverty. *Photography*: Mahmud Kalari, Fabio Olmi and Chris Menges. *Editing*: Babak Karimi, Giovanni Ziberna and Jonathan Morris. *Music*: George Fenton. *Sound*: Francesco Liottard, Maricetta Lombardo and Ray Beckett. *Cast*: Carlo Delle Piane, Valeria Bruni Tedeschi, Silvania De Santis, Filippo Tojano, Martin Thompson, William Ruane, Gary Maitland, Blerta Cahani, Klajdi Qorraj. *Format*: 35mm. *Synopsis*: A train journey from Central Europe to Rome provides the background for the three directors to interweave different stories.

Other Credits

1980

Ranandeh (The Driver), by Nasser Zeraati. Scriptwriter and editor.

1984

Negah (The Look) [short], by Ebrahim Foruzesh. Editor.
Zang-e dars, zang-e tafrih (Class Bell, Breaktime Bell), by Iraj Karimi. Editor.

1985

Lahzeh-ha (Moments) [short], by Iraj Karimi. Editor.
Khodam, man khodam (I, Myself), by Ebrahim Foruzesh. Scriptwriter and editor.

1987

Kelid (The Key), by Ebrahim Foruzesh. Scriptwriter and editor.

1989
Seh chehreh az yek mobser (The Three Faces of a Class Delegate) [short], by Hassan Agha Karimi.
Scriptwriter
Zanbagha-haye vashi (The Wild Irises) [short], by Ebrahim Foruzesh.
Scriptwriter and editor.

1993
Safar be diar-e mosafer (Journey to the Land of the Traveller), by Bahman Kiarostami. Producer.

1995
Badkonak-e sefid (The White Balloon), by Jafar Panahi. Scriptwriter.
Safar (The Journey), by Ali Reza Raisian. Scriptwriter.

1997
Tarh (The Project), by Bahman Kiarostami. Producer and scriptwriter.

1999
Bid va bad (The Willow and the Wind), by Mohammad Ali Talebi. Scriptwriter.

2001
Dashtan va nadashtan (To Have or Have Not), by Niki Karimi. Producer.

2001
Istgah-e matruk (The Deserted Station), by Ali Reza Raisian. Original story.

2003
Tala-ye sorgh (Crimson Gold), by Jafar Panahi. Scriptwriter.

Films about Abbas Kiarostami

1994
Abbas Kiarostami: Vérités et songes (Abbas Kiarostami: Truths and Illusions), by Jean-Pierre Limosin. 52 minutes.

1996
Il giorno della prima di 'Close-Up' (The Day of the Opening of *Close-Up*), by Nanni Moretti.
7 minutes.
Klozap, namay-e dur (Close-Up, Long Shot), by Moslem Mansuri and Mahmud Shokrolahi.
44 minutes.

1997
Abbas Kiarostami a Palermo (Abbas Kiarostami in Palermo), by Nosrat Panahi Nejad. 45 minutes.

1999
Volte sempre, Abbas! (Come Back Again, Abbas!), by Renata de Almeida and Leon Cakoff.
6 minutes.
A Week with Kiarostami, by Yuji Mohara. 90 minutes.

2000
Close-Up Kiarostami, by Mahmud Behraznia. 42 minutes.
Kiarostami 101, by Jamshid Akrami. 20 minutes.

2002
La leçon de cinéma (A Lesson in Cinema), by Mojdeh Famili.
52 minutes.

2003
Abbas Kiarostami: the Art of Living, by Pat Collins and Fergus Daly.
54 minutes.

A Walk with Kiarostami, by Jamshid Akrami. 31 minutes.
Il Taziyé di Kiarostami, by Serafino Amato. 52 minutes.

Notes

Chapter One

1. 'Quotations from Abbas Kiarostami, 1978–1999', *Film International*, n. 25, Summer 1999, p. 23.
2. 'Le Monde d'A. K.', in Laurent Roth (ed.), *Abbas Kiarostami: Textes, entretiens, filmographie complète*, Paris, Editions de l'Etoile/Cahiers du Cinéma, 1997, p. 26.
3. See 'Intervista con Abbas Kiarostami', in Francesco Bono (ed.), *L'Iran e i suoi schermi* (Venice/Pesaro, Marsilio Editori/Mostra Internazionale del Nuovo Cinema, 1990), pp. 156 and 158, and Laurent Roth, 'Le monde d'A. K.', p. 23.
4. Stéphane Goudet, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami: Les yeux du cœur', *Positif*, n. 466, December 1999, p. 9.
5. 'Intervista con Abbas Kiarostami', pp. 157–158.
6. 'Intervista con Abbas Kiarostami', p. 158. At a later date, Kiarostami explained to Michel Ciment, 'Trente questions à Abbas Kiarostami sur ses photographies', in Abbas Kiarostami, *Photographies, Photographs, Fotografie* (Paris, Editions Hazan, 1999), p. 19: 'Before becoming a photographer, I used to paint. But I have never really considered myself as a painter: painting was just a form of therapy.' Kiarostami gave up painting for good in 1982 (Stéphane Goudet, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami: Les yeux du cœur', p. 15), concentrating progressively on photography, poetry and carpentry as more compelling hobbies.
7. See 'Trente questions', in Abbas Kiarostami, *Photographies*, pp. 8–9. On another occasion he explained: 'I've learned a lot from graphic design, which in my opinion is the mother of all art forms. You have to say what

you want to say in a small space – the page of a magazine, for example – and say it in a convincing way, satisfying the requirements of your client and persuading the public to, for example, open an account in the bank that is advertising. It is the art of communication.' ('Intervista con Abbas Kiarostami', p. 157).

8. 'Intervista con Abbas Kiarostami', p. 156. According to Marco Della Nave, *Abbas Kiarostami* (Milan, Editrice Il Castoro, 1998), p. 22, at present all these advertising films are in the hands of an American private collector, and cannot therefore be seen.
9. 'Le monde d'A. K.', in Laurent Roth (ed.), *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 25.
10. 'Intervista con Abbas Kiarostami', p. 159. Together with several other Kanun colleagues, Kiarostami was sent to Czechoslovakia at the beginning of the 1970s to complete his training and explore *in situ* the work of local film-makers in children's films and animations.
11. See, for example, his comments to Philip Lopate, 'Kiarostami Close Up', *Film Comment*, vol. 32, n. 4, July–August 1996, p. 37, and Janine Euvrard, 'Retrouver l'enfance: Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami', *24 Images*, n. 75, December 1994– January 1995, p. 14.
12. 'De Sophia Loren à *La dolce vita*', *Positif*, n. 400, June 1994, pp. 60–61. Also 'Intervista con Abbas Kiarostami', p. 159.
13. 'De Sophia Loren à *La dolce vita*', p. 61. Very soon afterwards, in an interview with Vincent Rémy, '*Au travers des oliviers*', *Télérama*, n. 2350, 25th January 1995, p. 26, he again stressed his debt to Fellini but roundly maintained that his favourite film by the director is *La strada*.
14. Philippe Piazzo and Frédéric Richard, 'Jusqu'au bout de la route: Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami', *Positif*, n. 380, October 1992, p. 32. Some years later, when he was asked for a contribution to the commemorative monograph *Nouvelle Vague: Une légende en question* (*Cahiers du Cinéma*, special issue, 1999), he maintained (p. 96): 'I was a nineteen-year-old film buff when I went to see the 'New Wave' films at the Tehran Film Archives ...'
15. A detailed list of his various statements on the subject would undoubtedly be very tedious and, ultimately, irrelevant. Suffice it to mention, simply as one illustration, how his early lack of interest in Bresson turned into profound admiration in later interviews: see, for example, 'Intervista con Abbas Kiarostami', p. 162; 'Le monde d'A.K.', in Laurent Roth (ed.), *Abbas Kiarostami*, pp. 28–29; and Thierry Jousse and Serge Toubiana, 'Un Film n'a pas de passeport: Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, n. 541, December 1999, p. 33.
16. An incomplete list would include Bresson and Tarkovski (Thierry Jousse and Serge Toubiana, 'Un Film n'a pas de passeport', p. 33), Hou Hsiao-hsien and Víctor Erice (David Walsh, 'The Compassionate Gaze: Iranian Filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami at the San Francisco Film Festival', *World Socialist Web Site*, 12th June 2000), Emir Kusturica, whose *Underground* he considers to be the most important film of the 1990s ('Film in the Nineties: A *Film Comment* Poll', *Film Comment*, vol. 36, n. 1, January–February 2000, p. 57), and – taking obvious pleasure in the unexpected suggestion – *The Godfather* by Francis Ford Coppola (David Sterritt, 'With Borrowed Eyes: Abbas Kiarostami Talks', *Film Comment*, vol. 36, n. 4, July–August 2000, p. 23).
17. 'Intervista con Abbas Kiarostami', p. 159.
18. 'Intervista con Abbas Kiarostami', pp. 159–162.
19. 'Intervista con Abbas Kiarostami', p. 159.
20. An exploration of these two movements can be found in Alberto Elena, 'Los nuevos cines iraníes', chapter 8 of *Los cines periféricos (África, Oriente Medio, India)* (Barcelona, Ediciones Paidós, 1999), pp. 263–288.
21. Saeed Sharifi, 'Center for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (1965–1996)', *Goftogu*, n. 19, Spring 1998, pp. 29–37. The reference is from the English translation given on the website [www.netiran.com/Htdocs/Clippings/Art/980422XXAR01.html].
22. Shahzad Rahmati and Majid Sedqi, 'A Nest for the Different Ones: A Glance at the Center for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults', *Film International*, n. 18, Summer 1997, pp. 14–19.
23. Marco Dalla Gassa, *Abbas Kiarostami* (Genoa, Le Mani–Microart's Edizioni, 2000), p. 16.
24. Laurent Roth, '*Le Pain et la rue*', in Laurent Roth (ed.), *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 88.
25. For example, 'Intervista con Abbas Kiarostami', p. 159.
26. Questioned about this lack of dialogue in his early films, Kiarostami answered simply: 'I can't explain it. All I remember is that at the time I shot my first films, I wasn't very talkative'; see Michel Ciment and Stéphane Goudet, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami: Un approche existentialiste de la vie', *Positif*, n. 442, December 1997, p. 85.
27. Majid Eslami, 'The Freshness of Repetition: *Where Is the Friend's Home?* Thirteen Years Later', *Film International*, n. 26–27, Autumn 1999–Summer 2000, p. 109.
28. Alain Bergala, '*La Récréation*', in Laurent Roth (ed.), *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 90.
29. For Kiarostami's thoughts on football and the role it plays in several of his films, see 'First Life, Then Soccer', *Film International*, n. 21, Summer 1998, pp. 40–42.
30. Alain Bergala, '*La Récréation*', in Laurent Roth (ed.), *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 91.
31. 'Quotations from Abbas Kiarostami, 1978–1999', p. 28.
32. Hamid Dabashi, *Close Up: Iranian Cinema, Past, Present and Future* (London and New York, Verso, 2001), pp. 46–47.

33. 'Intervista con Abbas Kiarostami', p. 162. An English translation of Naderi's original story, 'The Experience', was published in *Film International*, vol. 1, n. 4, Autumn 1993, pp. 26–28.
34. As mentioned earlier, Kiarostami would always recognize the 'profound impact' ('Intervista con Abbas Kiarostami', p. 162) of this film on his film-making career.
35. Youssef Ishaghpour, *Le Réel, face et pile: Le cinéma d'Abbas Kiarostami* (Tours, Editions Farrago, 2000), p. 33. It is not surprising, from this point of view, that *The Experience* has remained strictly banned in Iran since the Revolution; in addition, it does not conform – like so many other films of the same period – to the regulations on feminine dress laid down by the Islamic Republic.
36. Alain Bergala, '*Expérience*', in Laurent Roth (ed.), *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 93.
37. 'Intervista con Abbas Kiarostami', p. 162.
38. Amir Naderi, 'The Experience', p. 28.
39. Youssef Ishaghpour, *Le Réel*, p. 60.
40. Frédéric Richard, 'Mal d'images: *Le Passager*', *Positif*, n. 372, February 1992, p. 53.
41. Danièle Parra, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami, l'humaniste', *La Revue du Cinéma/Image et Son*, n. 478, January 1992, p. 21.
42. Godfrey Cheshire, 'Abbas Kiarostami: A Cinema of Questions', *Film Comment*, vol. 32, n. 4, July–August 1996, p. 41.
43. Marcel Martin, '*Le Passager/Mosafer*, d'Abbas Kiarostami (Iran, 1974)', in Jean-Louis Vey (ed.), *Leur premier film* (Annonay, Festival du Premier Film–Aléas, 1993), p. 148.
44. Charles Tesson, '*Le Passager*', in Laurent Roth (ed.), *Abbas Kiarostami*, pp. 97–98.
45. Marco Dalla Gassa, *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 26.
46. Interview with G. Lawrence, 'Abbas Kiarostami: 'Debería prohibirse la entrada a los niños a este festival', *El Comercio*, 28th June 1975, p. 9.
47. Hormuz Kéy, *Le Cinéma iranien:L'image d'une societé en bouillonnement* (Paris, Editions Karthala, 1999), p. 62.
48. Hormuz Kéy, *Le Cinéma iranien*, pp. 61–62.
49. For example, Marcel Martin, '*Le Passager/Mosafer*, d'Abbas Kiarostami (Iran, 1974)', p. 139, and Jean-Claude Biette, 'A Pied d'oeuvre', *Trafic*, n. 2, Spring 1992, p. 138.
50. Interview with G. Lawrence, *El Comercio*, 28th June 1975, p. 9.
51. Twenty years later Kiarostami met Darabi again and they held one or two interesting conversations in public, at the same time as Kiarostami's son was shooting a touching video documentary, *Journey to the Land of the Traveller* (*Safar be diar-e mosafer*, Bahman Kiarostami, 1993). See Houshang Golmakani, 'Dreams Gone with the Wind: Kiarostami Meets His Actor in *The Traveller* after 20 Years', *Film International*, vol. 4, n. 3, Summer 1996, pp. 40–45.
52. 'Intervista con Abbas Kiarostami', p. 165.
53. No doubt because, among other things, it was shown in its original version with no subtitles whatsoever amid an understandable racket caused by the audience of children in the cinema. See the above-mentioned interview in the daily newspaper *El Comercio*. The author, G. Lawrence, had nevertheless written a very complimentary article the day before, highlighting the lyricism and poetry of 'this perfectly made film' and concluding with this comment: 'The director of the film, Abbas Kiarostami, should be justly proud of his work' ('Ayer vimos ...', *El Comercio*, 27th June 1975, p. 11). See, on the other hand, Luis García's dismissive reference, 'Gijón-75: el festival de las paradojas', *Cinema 2002*, n. 7, September 1975, p. 42.
54. Quoted by Shahmed Rastin, 'Abbas Kiarostami: Simple and Complicated', *Film International*, n. 25, Summer 1999, p. 19.
55. Sylvie Rollet, 'Un Esthétique de la trace', *Positif*, n. 442, December 1997, p. 91.
56. See, for example, Saeed Sharifi, 'Center for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (1965–1996)'. Godfrey Cheshire also makes indirect reference to this controversy in 'Abbas Kiarostami: Seeking a Home', in John Boorman and Walter Donohue (eds), *Projections 8. Film-makers on Film-making* (London, Faber and Faber, 1998), p. 220.
57. Laurent Roth, 'Abbas Kiarostami: Le dompteur de regard', in Laurent Roth (ed.), *Abbas Kiarostami*, pp. 7–8.
58. See Jonathan Rosenbaum, 'Short and Sweet: Kiarostami's Experimental Origins', *Film Comment*, vol. 36, n. 4, July–August 2000, p. 27.
59. For example, Jean Breschand, '*Les Couleurs*', in Laurent Roth (ed.), *Abbas Kiarostami*, pp. 103–105.
60. Hamid Dabashi, *Close Up*, p. 52. See also Jonathan Rosenbaum, 'Short and Sweet', p. 27.
61. Tullio Masoni, 'Abbas Kiarostami: i pazienti percorsi di un non-dissidente', *Cineforum*, n. 329, December 1993, p. 36.
62. Jean-Marc Lalanne, '*Avec ou sans ordre*', in Laurent Roth (ed.), *Abbas Kiarostami*, pp. 115–116.
63. Hamid Dabashi, *Close Up*, p. 60.
64. Oksana Bulgakowa, 'Die Kamera hinter dem Spiegel: Abbas Kiarostami und seine frühen Arbeiten', *Film-Dienst*, vol. 48, n. 21, 1995, p. 6.
65. Gilberto Perez, 'Film in Review: The Edges of Realism', *The Yale Review*, vol. 85, n. 1, January 1997, p. 178.
66. 'Intervista con Abbas Kiarostami', p. 155.
67. Jean-Luc Nancy, *L'Evidence du film: Abbas Kiarostami* (Brussels, Yves Gevaert Editeur, 2001), p. 24.
68. Carlos F. Heredero, 'Abbas Kiarostami: más allá de la realidad, más cerca

de lo real', *Nosferatu. Revista de Cine*, n. 19, October 1995, p. 82.

69. Laurent Roth, 'Abbas Kiarostami: Le dompteur de regard', in Laurent Roth (ed.), *Abbas Kiarostami*, pp. 8–9, and Marzia Milanesi, 'E il cinema continua ... (dietro un paio di occhiali fumé)', *Catalogo della Mostra Internazionale Riminicinema 1993* (Rimini, 1993), pp. 90–92.
70. Shahzad Rahmati and Majid Sedqi, 'A Nest for the Different Ones', p. 18.
71. Marco Della Nave, *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 54.
72. Marco Dalla Gassa, *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 40.
73. Alain Bergala, '*Solution*', in Laurent Roth (ed.), *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 109.
74. 'Quotations from Abbas Kiarostami, 1978–1999', pp. 20–21.
75. Marco Della Nave, *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 62.
76. 'A Debate with Abbas Kiarostami', *Film International*, vol. 3, n. 1, Winter 1995, p. 47.
77. For Kiarostami's own recollection of the incident, see Marco Dalla Gassa (ed.), 'Il cinema, probabilmente', in Alberto Barbera and Elisa Resegotti (eds.), *Kiarostami* (Milan and Turin, Electa-Museo Nazionale del Cinema, 2003), p. 133.
78. The expression is taken from the title of the excellent book by Fariba Adelkhah, Jean-François Bayart and Olivier Roy, *Thermidor en Iran* (Brussels, Editions Complexe, 1993).
79. See Massoud Mehrabi, 'The History of Iranian Cinema: Documentary Films', *Film International*, vol. 4, n. 4, Summer 1997, p. 49.
80. Olivier Joyard, 'Un Kiarostami inédit', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, n. 509, January 1997, p. 20.
81. Shahzad Rahmati and Majid Sedqi, 'A Nest for the Different Ones', p. 15.
82. Kiarostami admits as much in the interview he granted to Philippe Piazzo and Frédéric Richard, 'Jusqu'au bout de la route', p. 33.
83. Bahman Farmanara had already directed *Ghamar Khanom's House* (*Khane-ye Ghamar Khanom*, 1972) and *Prince Ehtejab* (*Shazdeh Ehtejab*, 1974), making ready to shoot shortly afterwards what would be his last film before going into self-imposed exile in Canada as a result of the Islamic Revolution: *Tall Shadows of the Wind* (*Sayeh-ha-ye boland-e bad*, 1978), a film which boasts 'the dubious distinction of having been banned by both the Shah and Khomeini's regime', in the ironic words of the director himself. Quoted in Hamid Dabashi, *Close Up*, p. 112, which includes a long and illuminating interview with Farmanara.
84. Among the numerous accounts of the emergence of the Iranian New Wave and its evolution during the 1970s, the following are particularly recommended: Hamid Naficy, 'Iranian Cinema', in Oliver Leaman (ed.), *Companion Encyclopedia of Middle Eastern and North African Film* (London and New York, Routledge, 2001), pp. 153–161, and Mamad Haghighat and Frédéric Sabouraud, *Histoire du cinéma iranien, 1900–1999* (Paris,

Cinéma du Réel–BPI Centre Georges Pompidou, 1999), pp. 63–123.

85. Michel Ciment, 'Les Possibilités du dialogue: Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami', *Positif*, n. 368, October 1991, p. 78.
86. See the comments included in 'Le Monde d'A.K.', in Laurent Roth (ed.), *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 29, and Godfrey Cheshire, 'Abbas Kiarostami: Seeking a Home', p. 220.
87. Godfrey Cheshire, 'Abbas Kiarostami: Seeking a Home', p. 223.
88. On one of the few occasions throughout his film-making career that Kiarostami used professional actors (or actresses), the role of Azam is played by the young Shohreh Aghdaslu, who after the Revolution emigrated to the United States, becoming an important figure within the Iranian community in that country, evidenced for example by her appearance in the recent and symbolic *America So Beautiful* (Babak Shokrian, 2001) and, more significantly, her nomination for an Oscar as Best Actress in a Supporting Role in *House of Sand and Fog* (Vadim Perelman, 2003).
89. Comments to Stéphane Goudet, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami: Les yeux du cœur', p. 12.
90. Eric Fournier, '*Le Rapport*', in Laurent Roth (ed.), *Abbas Kiarostami*, pp. 106–107.
91. Youssef Ishaghpour, *Le Réel*, p. 63.
92. Translated from the Spanish edition of Ryszard Kapuscinski, *El Sha, o la desmesura del poder* (Barcelona, Editorial Anagrama, 1987; first edition, *Szachinszach*, Warsaw, Czytelnik, 1982), p. 120. (The excerpt does not appear in the considerably abbreviated English version, *Shah of Shahs*, San Diego, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985, nor in subsequent reprints.) Kapuscinski's masterful study remains an indispensable account: the events during the period 1977–1978 are covered specifically in pp. 104–132 of the aforementioned edition. On the subject of the re-awakening of democratic opposition during these crucial years, with particular emphasis on cultural circles, see also the relevant section of the splendid study by Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ali Mohammadi, *Small Media, Big Revolution: Communication, Culture, and the Iranian Revolution* (Minneapolis and London, University of Minnesota Press, 1994), pp. 95–104.
93. See Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, 'Protest and Perish: A History of the Writers' Association of Iran', *Iranian Studies*, vol. 18, Spring–Autumn 1985, pp. 189–29.
94. Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadegi* (Tehran, 1962; author's edition). The neologism of the book's title has been translated in many different ways into Western languages; here I have chosen to use Robert Campbell's in his *Occidentosis: A Plague from the West* (Berkeley, Mizan Press, 1983).
95. Eric Fournier, '*Le Rapport*', in Laurent Roth (ed.), *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 107.
96. See, for example, Bill Krohn's observations in 'Raison(s) d'un festival', *Trafic*, n. 16, Autumn 1995, pp. 6 and 12.

97. Youssef Ishaghpour, *Le Réel*, p. 62.
98. Kiarostami has very often emphasized his refusal to show anything to the audience in a clear and transparent way, even adding that he would prefer to give them the impression that they are seeing and hearing what happens on screen as if by chance. See, for example, his comments in 'A Debate with Abbas Kiarostami', p. 48.
99. Taken from 'Quotations from Abbas Kiarostami, 1978–1999', p. 20. Here Dariush Mehrjui's favourable opinion can also be found.
100. Youssef Ishaghpour, *Le Réel*, p. 64.

Chapter Two

1. Michel Foucault, 'L'Esprit d'un monde sans esprit', interview in Claire Brière and Pierre Blanchet, *Iran: La révolution au nom de Dieu* (Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1979). Quoted from Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits II, 1976–1988* (Paris, Editions Gallimard, 2001), p. 746.
2. Michel Foucault, ibid.
3. There is no room here to summarize the lengthy bibliography of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, but an excellent review and discussion can be found in Azadeh Kian-Thiébaut, *Secularization of Iran: A Doomed Failure? The New Middle Class and the Making of Modern Iran* (Paris, Institut d'Etudes Iraniennes-Diffusion Peeters, 1998), pp. 197–210.
4. Regardless of how events developed over the next few years, there is no doubt that Khomeini willingly and enthusiastically embraced many elements of left-wing ideology during these years of dizzying social and political change; he shared, for example, the nationalist, anti-imperialist and egalitarian discourse of the left, specifically identifying the *mostazafin* (or the 'deprived ones', an essentially religious term) with the proletariat. An excellent summary of this 'revolutionary reading of Shi'ism' can be found in Farhad Khosrokhavar and Olivier Roy, *Iran: Comment sortir d'une révolution religieuse* (Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1999), pp. 42–47. For a stimulating interpretation of Khomeinism as a variation of the Third-World populism that was so much in vogue during this period, see Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic* (London and New York, I. B. Tauris, 1993).
5. See Chapour Haghighat, *Iran, la révolution Islamique: De la chute du Chah à l'affaire Rushdie* (Brussels, Editions Complexe, 1989), p. 236.
6. Sussan Siavoshi, 'Cultural Policies and the Islamic Republic: Cinema and Book Publication', *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 29, n. 4, 1997, p. 513.
7. Ruhollah Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations* (London, KPI, 1985), p. 258.
8. The best study of the changes in the Iranian film industry after the Islamic Revolution remains that of Hamid Naficy, 'Islamizing Film Culture in Iran: An Update', in *Cahiers d'études sur la Méditerranée orientale et le monde turco-iranien*, n. 20, July–December 1995, pp. 145–185.
9. Houshang Golmakani, 'No Trivia, No Masterpieces', *Cinemaya. The Asian Film Quarterly*, n. 3, Spring 1989, p. 18.
10. This fitting phrase was coined by Houshang Golmakani, 'The Sweet Smell of Success: Iranian Cinema since 1979', *Film International*, vol. 1, n. 1, Winter 1993, p. 44.
11. Regarding the measures adopted in 1983–1984 in an attempt to stimulate the recovery of the Iranian cinema industry, see the report by Mohammad-Mehdi Dadgoo, 'Government Policies', *Cinemaya. The Asian Film Quarterly*, n. 22, Winter 1993–1994, pp. 64–65.
12. See Deborah Young, 'Iranian Cinema Now', in Peter Cowie (ed.), *Variety International Film Guide 1993* (London, André Deutsch, 1993), pp. 29–30.
13. For information about the participation of Iranian films in international festivals during this period, see, for example, Houshang Golmakani, 'Beyond the Shadow of a Doubt', *Cinemaya. The Asian Film Quarterly*, n. 22, Winter 1993–1994, pp.52–56.
14. Apart from Shahid Saless, who emigrated to Germany before the Revolution, the only important missing figures were Parviz Kimiavi and Marva Nabili, in exile in France and the United States respectively. The work of other film-makers in exile, such as Reza Allamehzadeh and Parviz Sayyad, was mainly developed after the Islamic Revolution and is not therefore strictly relevant to the question of continuity. The work of some of these displaced Iranian film-makers is superbly analyzed by Hamid Naficy in *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2001), in particular pp. 74–87, 199–210 and 243–269.
15. Interview with Miriam Rosen, 'The Camera of Art: An Interview with Abbas Kiarostami', *Cinéaste*, vol. 19, n. 2–3, 1992, p. 39.
16. Majid Eslami, 'The Freshness of Repetition: *Where Is the Friend's Home?* Thirteen Years Later', p. 108.
17. Jean Breschand, 'Le Choeur', in Laurent Roth (ed.), *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 119.
18. Laurent Roth, 'Le Concitoyen', in Laurent Roth (ed.), *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 120.
19. These three references are convincingly suggested by the Mexican essayist Naief Yehya in his intelligent commentary on the film, 'Kiarostami: y la vida continúa, y la cinefilia vive (I)', *Uno más Uno*, Suplemento Sábado, 6th July 1996.
20. Marco Della Nave, *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 67.
21. Yves Thoraval, 'Abbas Kiarostami, le maître du documentaire fiction',

Cinéma, n. 483, December 1991, p. 21.

22. Oksana Bulgakowa, 'Die Kamera hinter dem Spiegel: Abbas Kiarostami und seine frühen Arbeiten', p. 6.
23. Interview with Michel Boujut, 'Abbas Kiarostami: Comment peut-on être un cinéaste persan?', *L'Evénement du Jeudi*, 14th–20th May 1992, p. 141.
24. Written around 1175, *Manteq at-tair* (The Assembly of Birds) is one of the great classics of Persian literature and therefore undoubtedly well-known to Kiarostami. Among the many modern editions of the work, Peter Avery's is particularly recommended, entitled *The Speech of Birds* (Cambridge, Islamic Texts Society, 1998), while the best reference study remains that of Hellmut Ritter, *Das Meer der Seele: Gott, Welt und Mensch in den Geschichten Fariduddin Attars* (Leiden, Brill, 1955).
25. Laurent Roth, '*Le Concitoyen*', in Laurent Roth (ed.), *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 120.
26. Hamid Dabashi, *Close Up*, p. 61.
27. 'Intervista con Abbas Kiarostami', p. 163.
28. See Elaine Sciolino, *Persian Mirrors: The Elusive Face of Iran* (New York, Touchstone Books, 2000), p. 268.
29. In addition to *The Key*, the formal partnership between Foruzesh and Kiarostami produced three medium-length features: *The Look* (*Negah*, 1985), *I, Myself* (*Khodam, man khodam*, 1985) and *The Wild Irises* (*Zanbagha-ye vahshi*, 1989). In all three cases Kiarostami wrote the script and acted as editor.
30. See Massoud Mehrabi, 'Ebrahim Forouzesh: Behind Closed Doors', *Film International*, vol. 2, n. 2, Spring 1994, pp. 34–35.
31. Godfrey Cheshire, 'Abbas Kiarostami: A Cinema of Questions', p. 41.
32. Jean-Marc Lalanne, 'Les Premiers', in Laurent Roth (ed.), *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 121.
33. See, for example, Oksana Bulgakowa, 'Die Kamera hinter dem Spiegel: Abbas Kiarostami und seine frühen Arbeiten', p. 6; Hormuz Kéy, *Le Cinéma iranien*, p. 99; and Hamid Dabashi, *Close Up*, pp. 61–62.
34. Jean-Marc Lalanne, 'Les Premiers', p. 122, and Marco Dalla Gassa, *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 51.
35. Marco Dalla Gassa, *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 50.
36. In between these two films Kiarostami made *Where Is the Friend's House?*, one of his most important works, which is analyzed in the next section.
37. The headmaster of the school is favourably disposed to the making of the film, as he knows Kiarostami's work and says he has seen *First Graders* on television. The Shahid Massoumi School in Tehran is, in fact, the school that Kiarostami's son Bahman attended: we see him briefly in the opening sequence, but he did not want to appear in the film proper. See Stéphane Goudet, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami: Manipulations', *Positif*, n. 442, December 1997, p. 97.

38. Youssef Ishaghpour, *Le Réel*, p. 30.
39. Stéphane Goudet, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami: Manipulations', p. 98.
40. Peter Matthews, 'A Little Learning', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 12, n. 6, June 2002, p. 31.
41. Kiarostami's own comments on the subject can be found in Laurence Giavarini and Thierry Jousse, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, n. 461, November 1992, p. 34.
42. Marco Della Nave, *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 84.
43. See Hamid Dabashi, *Close Up*, pp. 65–66, and Hormuz Kéy, *Le Cinéma iranien*, pp. 117–118.
44. François Niney, '*Devoirs du soir*', in Laurent Roth (ed.), *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 127.
45. Comments included in 'Au revoir, les enfants? Abbas Kiarostami in Isfahan', *Film International*, vol. 1, n. 4, Autumn 1993, p. 41.
46. Gilberto Perez, 'Film in Review: The Edges of Realism', p. 179.
47. Peter Matthews, 'A Little Learning', p. 32.
48. A good analysis, carried out more or less when the film was made, emerges from the contributions in the collective volume edited by Bernard Hourcade and Yann Richard (eds), *Téhéran: Au dessous du volcan* (Paris, Editions Autrement, 1987).
49. The terrifying *komiteh* were 'local groups who during the Revolution patrolled neighbourhoods, factories, the city streets ... and who have been gradually "sanitized" and included among the instruments of oppression of the new regime', according to the description of Farhad Khosrokhavar and Olivier Roy in their previously cited *Iran: Comment sortir d'une révolution religieuse*, p. 28.
50. Peter Matthews, 'A Little Learning', p. 32.
51. See Stéphane Goudet, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami: Manipulations', p. 97.
52. The controversial sequence was not even included in the versions of *Homework* shown on the occasion of the large-scale retrospective dedicated to Kiarostami during the Tehran Fajr International Film Festival in February 2000, as I can personally confirm. It is worth mentioning that the crowds who packed the cinema laughed and applauded enthusiastically during the children's interviews, and gave a resounding ovation to the above-mentioned comments of the father.
53. Interview with Michel Boujut, 'Abbas Kiarostami: Comment peut-on être un cinéaste persan?', p. 141.
54. Gilberto Perez, 'Film in Review: The Edges of Realism', p. 180.
55. Quoted by François Niney, '*Devoirs du soir*', in Laurent Roth (ed.), *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 126.
56. Hamid Dabashi, *Close Up*, p. 63, and Youssef Ishaghpour, *Le Réel*, p. 71.

57. Hamid Dabashi, *Close Up*, p. 63.
58. Ahmad hardly knows Mohammad Reza, and he is really just a classmate rather than a friend. The reasons why Kiarostami uses this word in the film will become apparent further on, but for the moment let us simply be aware of the pure solidarity of Ahmad's actions.
59. According to Kiarostami, *Where Is the Friend's House?* is based on a story written by a schoolteacher about a girl who does her classmate's homework so that he won't be punished, and also on a little family anecdote about one of his sons when he was about Ahmad's age – he walked six kilometres through the streets of Tehran rather than go back home without the packet of cigarettes he had been sent to buy. See Michel Ciment, 'Les Possibilités du dialogue: Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami', p. 79.
60. Laurent Roth, 'Abbas Kiarostami: Le dompteur de regard', in Laurent Roth (ed.), *Abbas Kiarostami*, pp. 10–11.
61. Emanuela Imparato, '*Dov'è la casa del mio amico?*', *Cineforum*, n. 312, March 1992, pp. 67–68.
62. Quoted in Bruno Roberti (ed.), *Abbas Kiarostami* (Rome, Dino Audino Editore, 1996), p. 23.
63. See, for example, Hormuz Kéy, *Le Cinéma iranien*, pp. 57, 107 and 116, and Peter Rist, 'Meeting Abbas Kiarostami', *Offscreen,* 6th March 2001 [www.horsechamp.qc.ca/new offscreen/kiarostami.html].
64. Hormuz Kéy, *Le Cinéma iranien*, p. 112, and Laurent Roth, 'Abbas Kiarostami: Le dompteur de regard', in Laurent Roth (ed.), *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 10.
65. Majid Eslami, 'The Freshness of Repetition: *Where Is the Friend's Home?* Thirteen Years Later', p. 113.
66. The expressionist dimension of this sequence has been very well highlighted by Asier Aranzubia, 'Abbas Kiarostami: la trilogía de Koker', *Opus Cero. Revista de Cine*, n. 9, March–April 2000, p. 19; and Aldo Alloni and Alberto Scandola, 'Dietro la porta chiusa: viaggio iniziatico in uno spazio espressionista', in Luca Sandrini and Alberto Scandola (eds), *Sentieri incrociati: il cinema di Abbas Kiarostami* (Verona, Cierre Edizioni, 1998), p. 32.
67. David Oubiña, 'Algunas reflexiones sobre un plano en un film de un cineasta iraní', *Punto de vista*, n. 59, December 1997, p. 23.
68. See Farah Nayeri, 'Abbas Kiarostami in Interview', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 3, n. 12, December 1993, p. 27.
69. Laurent Roth, '*Où est la maison de mon ami?*', in Laurent Roth (ed.), *Abbas Kiarostami*, pp. 124–125.
70. Comments by the director in the film *Abbas Kiarostami: Truths and Illusions* (Jean-Pierre Limosin, 1994).
71. Iraj Karimi had just published his monograph *Abbas Kiarostami, filmsaz-e realiste* (Abbas Kiarostami, the Realist Film-maker) (Tehran, Nashr-e Ahu, 1986).

72. See Alberto Elena, *Satyajit Ray* (Madrid, Ediciones Cátedra, 1998), pp. 55–59.
73. See 'Intervista con Abbas Kiarostami', p. 165.
74. Houshang Golmakani in his review for *Film*, n. 71, March 1988, p. 85; quoted in Hormuz Kéy, *Le Cinéma iranien*, pp. 115-116.
75. See Hamid Dabashi, *Close Up*, pp. 50–51, 68 and 74.
76. In the absence of a full and accessible study of Sepehri's poetry, see the excellent biographical sketch by his friend and translator, Dariush Shayegan, included in the prologue to the French edition *Les Pas de l'eau* (Paris, Orphée/La Différence, 1991), pp. 7–23. A brief introduction to his artwork, with some examples, can be found in Rose Issa, Ruyin Pakbaz and Dariush Shayegan, *Iranian Contemporary Art* (London, Barbican Centre/Booth Clibborn Editions, 2001), in particular pp. 20–21, 75–77 and 135.
77. Although the film does not correspond literally with the poem, and no critic has to date drawn attention to a possible tribute, it is highly significant that *Mosafer* (The Traveller) is also the title of one of Sepehri's most famous poems. In the form of a dialogue between the poet and a friend who welcomes him into his house after a long journey, the poem is a celebration of sensory experience, of living for the moment and a call to make the journey of self-discovery, a journey that must be physical and spiritual at the same time. An English translation of the poem by Martin Turner, Abbas Faiz and Farah Turner can be found in *Modern Poetry in Translation* (new series), n. 1, Summer 1992; [included in www.50connect.co.uk/turner/ persian/persianSS05.html].
78. Quoted from *The Expanse of Green: Poems of Sohrab Sepehri*, trans. David L. Martin (Los Angeles and New York, Kalimat/UNESCO, 1988), pp. 45–46. In passing, it should be noted that the correct as well as more literal translation of the film's original title should be *Where Is the Friend's House?* and not, copying the untenable choice of the French exhibitors, *Where Is My Friend's House?*
79. Dariush Shayegan, prologue to Sohrab Sepehri, *Les Pas de l'eau*, p. 18.
80. In this regard, see the detailed comparative analysis carried out by Marco Dalla Gassa, *Abbas Kiarostami*, pp. 77–81.
81. Marco Della Nave, *Abbas Kiarostami*, pp. 77–78.
82. Statements included in Bruno Roberti (ed.), *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 35. According to the authoritative commentary by Annemarie Schimmel, *As Through a Veil. Mystical Poetry in Islam* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 72, in all of Central Asia the image of the tree has also been interpreted in secular terms as the fountain of life. In the Islamic tradition, 'the tree generally symbolizes man's search for a higher destiny, cleansed of all base thoughts', although it can also have other more precise meanings; see Malek Chebel, *Dictionnaire des symboles musulmans: Rites,*

mystique et civilisation (Paris, Editions Albin Michel, 1995), pp. 50–51. In later statements about his photographic work, Kiarostami spoke at length on this subject: 'Ibn Arabi says that trees and men are brothers [...] Persian literature also speaks of wonderful trees, trees that have human characteristics. The tree and the life of man are inextricably linked, because the tree has taken root in our daily lives, in our culture, in our spirit, in our myths and legends, as it has in the secrets and mysteries of all religions'; see Michel Ciment, 'Trente questions à Abbas Kiarostami sur ses photographies', pp. 23–24. In addition, of course, see the text of the 'Rencontre' with Abbas Kiarostami in Jean Mottet (ed.), *L'Arbre dans le paysage* (Seyssel, Editions Champ Vallon, 2002), pp. 231–238.

83. Abbas Kiarostami, 'La Photographie', in Laurent Roth (ed.), *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 38.
84. Interview with Mariachiara Pioppo, 'Le piccole cose che mi interesssano', *Cineforum*, n. 329, November 1993, p. 36.
85. Youssef Ishaghpour, *Le Réel*, p. 71.
86. Jalaluddin Rumi, *The Mathnavi* (London, EJW Gibb Memorial Trust, 1925–1940; Reynold A. Nicholson edition), III, 1140. Rumi, one of the key figures of the Sufi-inspired poetic tradition, is the subject of very many works, but the following are particularly recommended: Eva de Vitray-Meyerovitch, *Rumi et le soufisme* (Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1977) and Annemarie Schimmel's *I Am Wind, You Are Fire: The Life and Work of Rumi* (Boston, Shambhala Publications, 1992), reprinted by the same publisher in 2001with the title *Rumi's World: The Life and Work of the Great Sufi Poet.*
87. Majid Eslami, 'The Freshness of Repetition: *Where Is the Friend's Home?* Thirteen Years Later', p. 112.
88. On this subject, and among a vast number of studies, we should mention in particular the two great works of Annemarie Schimmel: *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1975) and the previously cited *As Through a Veil. Mystical Poetry in Islam.*
89. Youssef Ishaghpour, *Le Réel*, p. 71.
90. Jalaluddin Rumi, *The Mathnavi*, I, 2943–2945.
91. Some interesting points about the relationship between Ahmad and the old man can be found in Chris Darke, '*Where Is my Friend's House?/ Khaneh-je Doost Kojast?*', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 6, n. 10, October 1996, p. 55; Emanuela Imparato, '*Dov'è la casa del mio amico?*', p. 69; and Hormuz Kéy, *Le Cinéma iranien*, pp. 112–113. We should also bear in mind the extraordinary spiritual and mystical echoes of the 'Nocturnal Journey' (*isra*) in the Islamic tradition: the actual title of a *sura* in the Qur'an ('The Nocturnal Journey'), it refers to Muhammad's journey from the Holy Mosque at Mecca to the Distant Mosque in Jerusalem, and also to his ascension to heaven and return to earth before the dawn. But, in a more general sense, 'for the Sufis, the *nocturnal journey* symbolizes the ascension of the soul, freed at last from the material world, to mystical knowledge'; Yves Thoraval, 'Voyage nocturne', in *Dictionnaire de civilisation musulmane* (Paris, Editions Larousse, 1995), p. 319.
92. Kiarostami recites to the camera a poem by Hafez that extols the times spent with friends as the most wonderful in life. Interestingly, in Kiarostami's films this theme is often presented from the opposite angle, showing the sterility and unhappiness caused by the lack of this same friendship.
93. Emanuela Imparato, '*Dov'è la casa del mio amico?*', p. 68.
94. Laurent Roth, '*Où est la maison de mon ami?*', in Laurent Roth (ed.), *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 125. Concerning Sepehri himself, see the comments by Dariush Shayegan in his prologue to *Les Pas de l'eau*, pp. 10–12.
95. Interview with Serge Toubiana, 'Le Goût du caché: Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, n. 518, November 1997, p. 68.
96. *Sorush*, n. 456, Winter 1988; quoted by Hormuz Kéy, *Le Cinéma iranien*, p. 115.
97. *Film*, n. 71, March 1988, p. 84; quoted by Majid Eslami, 'The Freshness of Repetition: *Where Is the Friend's Home?* Thirteen Years Later', p. 110.
98. See 'Le Monde d'A. K.', in Laurent Roth (ed.), *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 29.
99. Asier Aranzubia, 'Abbas Kiarostami: la trilogía de Koker', p. 19.
100. Majid Eslami, 'The Freshness of Repetition: *Where Is the Friend's Home?* Thirteen Years Later', pp. 110–111.
101. To give just one example, in the sequence of the meeting with the grandfather in the *shaikhane*, Kiarostami again plays with the use of sound, in this case confusing the spectator's understanding by juxtaposing two simultaneous dialogues – one in Farsi (between Ahmad and the old man) and the other in Turkish (between the grandfather and the neighbour). Whether the spectator understands the two languages and is somewhat confused by the use of both (a device that the director used again in *The Wind Will Carry Us*) or whether he can follow only the conversation in Farsi and is distracted by the 'background' noise of the other simultaneous conversation, Kiarostami seems to take pleasure in destroying the conventions of tonal uniformity in mainstream cinema.
102. Kiarostami had nevertheless previously been awarded several prizes and diplomas in various festivals in Italy, Mexico and the Soviet Union, but he had not yet really become known outside the specialist circle of children's film festivals. See Mohammad Atebbai, 'National and International Awards for Abbas Kiarostami's Films', *Film International*, n. 25, Summer 1999, p. 29.
103. Michel Ciment, 'Pourquoi Locarno est-il séduit par l'Orient?', *Positif*, n. 344, October 1989, p. 62.
104. Edna, '*Khane-je Doost Kojast* (Where Is My Friend's House?)', *Variety*, 16th–22nd August 1989, p. 24.

105. In addition, of course, to the large retrospective organized by the Mostra del Nuovo Cinema in Pesaro in 1990. Concerning the gradual entry of Iranian films to the festival circuit from this period onwards, see: Bill Nichols, 'Discovering Form, Inferring Meaning: New Cinemas and the Festival Circuit', *Film Quarterly*, vol. 47, n. 3, Spring 1994, pp. 16–30; Antonio Weinrichter, 'Geopolítica, festivales y Tercer Mundo: el cine iraní y Abbas Kiarostami', *Archivos de la Filmoteca*, n. 19, February 1995, pp. 29–36; Sharon Tay, 'New Waves, Authorships, and the Politics of the Festival Circuit: Abbas Kiarostami and the New Iranian Cinema', in Yvonne Tasker (ed.), *Fifty Contemporary Filmmakers* (London, Routledge, 2002), pp. 204–211; and Azadeh Farahmand, 'Perspectives on Recent (International Acclaim for) Iranian Cinema', in Richard Tapper (ed.), *The New Iranian Cinema: Politics, Representation and Identity* (London and New York, I. B. Tauris, 2002), pp. 86–108.
106. Reza Allamehzadeh, *Sarab-e sinema-ye islami-ye Iran* [The Illusion of an Islamic Cinema in Iran] (Saarbrücken, Nawid Verlag, 1991), p. 202; quoted by Hamid Dabashi, 'Re-reading Reality: Kiarostami's *Through the Olive Trees* and the Cultural Politics of a Postrevolutionary Aesthetics', *Critique. Journal for Critical Studies of the Middle East*, vol. 7, Autumn 1995, p. 73.

Chapter Three

1. The story of how the project started varies according to Kiarostami's and Makhmalbaf's own accounts, but the fullest and most interesting descriptions are Kiarostami's comments to Hormuz Kéy, *Le Cinéma iranien*, pp. 159–160, and Makhmalbaf's to Stéphane Goudet, 'Entretien avec Mohsen Makhmalbaf: Prises de position et prises de pouvoir', *Positif*, n. 422, April 1996, pp. 21–22.
2. Interview with Pat Aufderheide, 'Real Life Is More Important than Cinema: An Interview with Abbas Kiarostami', *Cinéaste*, vol. 21, n. 3, July 1995, p. 33.
3. Bernard Botiveau and Agnès Devictor, '*Close Up* de Kiarostami: De l'imaginaire cinématographique à la réalité du droit et de la justice', *Droits et Cultures*, vol. 36, 1998, pp. 200–201.
4. Quoted in Bruno Roberti (ed.), *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 43.
5. Marco Dalla Gassa, *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 126.
6. Kiarostami has stated on many occasions that *Close-Up* is his best film. To give only a few examples: his comments in Hormuz Kéy, *Le Cinéma iranien*, p. 168; Rashmi Doraiswamy, 'Abbas Kiarostami: Life and Much More', *Cinemaya. The Asian Film Quarterly*, n. 16, Summer 1992, p. 20; Gabriele Pedullà, Bruno Roberti and Francesco Suriano, 'Conversazione con Abbas Kiarostami', *Filmcritica*, vol. 46, n. 458, October 1995, p. 424; and Danièle Parra, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami, l'humaniste', p. 21.
7. Concerning Makhmalbaf, see the work of, among others, Alberto Barbera and Umberto Mosca (eds), *Mohsen Makhmalbaf* (Turin, Festival Internazionale Cinema Giovane–Lindau, 1996), and Lloyd Ridgeon, *Makhmalbaf's Broken Mirror: The Socio-Political Significance of Modern Iranian Cinema* (Durham, Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies/ University of Durham, 2000). Also of exceptional interest is the long interview included in Hamid Dabashi, *Close-Up*, pp. 156–212.
8. This is the title that he mentions in *Close-Up*, which refers explicitly to the parable of the spider in the Qur'an, *sura* 29, 41: 'The case of those who took up other protectors, apart from Allah, is like that of the spider who built a house. Truly, the most brittle of houses is the house of the spider, if only they know'; quoted in Majid Fakhry's translation, *An Interpretation of the Qur'an* (Reading, Garnet Publishing, 2000), p. 403. However, in the interview he gave to the weekly magazine *Sorush*, Sabzian maintains that in fact he wanted to call it – with just as much significance – *Misfortune* (*Ghessavat*). Quoted in Hormuz Kéy, *Le Cinéma iranien*, p. 143.
9. This is a modest sum, roughly equivalent to ten pounds at the time.
10. Bernard Botiveau and Agnès Devictor, '*Close Up* de Kiarostami', pp. 206–207.
11. Marco Della Nave, *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 91.
12. See his comments to Danièle Parra, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami, l'humaniste', p. 21.
13. Quoted in Bruno Roberti (ed.), *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 45.
14. See Kiarostami's comments in Bruno Roberti (ed.), *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 44, and Miriam Rosen, 'The Camera of Art: An Interview with Abbas Kiarostami', p. 39. A defence of the thesis which highlights the possible autobiographical elements in *Close-Up* can be found Youssef Ishaghpour, *Le Réel*, p. 69.
15. Guillermo Cabrera Infante, 'A través del mundo de Abbas Kiarostami', *El País/Babelia*, 17th December 1994, p. 2.
16. Michel Ciment, 'Les Possibilités du dialogue: Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami', p. 81.
17. Julio Masoni, '*Close Up*', *Cineforum*, n. 333, March 1994, p. 73. This strategy, unusual in Kiarostami's films, gave rise to the accusation by some Iranian critics of sentimentality on the director's part: see Robert Safarian, 'Simple-Minded Moralism of a Warm and Human Cinema', *Film International*, n. 28, Spring 2000, p. 63.
18. See Kiarostami's comments in Hormuz Kéy, *Le Cinéma iranien*, p. 162, about the difficulties that arose during shooting as a result of Sabzian's constant mistrust of the director's intentions. When shooting was over, and Kiarostami had played a decisive role in gaining his acquittal, Sabzian even sued Kiarostami for having made him spend three more days than

necessary in prison because of filming requirements; see Bernard Botiveau and Agnès Devictor, '*Close Up* de Kiarostami', p. 206. The interesting documentary *Close-Up, Long Shot* (*Klozap, namay-e dur*, Moslem Mansuri and Mahmud Shokrollahi, 1996) offers, in addition, a rather more unflattering portrait of the character than that which is presented by *Close Up*.

19. In his interview with Hormuz Kéy, *Le Cinéma iranien*, p. 161, Kiarostami also highlights unemployment as one of the decisive factors in the case, a point upon which Mehrdad Ahankhah (the younger son of the family) insists at the end of the trial. It is also interesting to note Kiarostami's comments, when pressed by his interviewer (pp. 169–170), about the attraction that the possibility of closer contact with the Ahankhahs' twenty-year-old daughter (a film fan who had failed her university entrance exam) might have held for Sabzian; the film nevertheless prudently leaves the daughter firmly in the background and does not even touch on this aspect.
20. Bernard Botiveau and Agnès Devictor, '*Close Up* de Kiarostami', p. 198. See also Marco Dalla Gassa's thoughts on the subject, *Abbas Kiarostami*, pp. 129–130.
21. The reference to Dostoyevsky can be found in Philip Lopate, 'Kiarostami Close Up', p. 39.
22. Kiarostami's comments to Hormuz Kéy, *Le Cinéma iranien*, p. 165.
23. Bernard Botiveau and Agnès Devictor, '*Close Up* de Kiarostami', p. 202.
24. Stéphane Goudet, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami: Manipulations', p. 95.
25. Bernard Botiveau and Agnès Devictor, '*Close Up* de Kiarostami', p. 207.
26. Marco Dalla Gassa, *Abbas Kiarostami*, pp. 135–136.
27. Gilberto Perez, 'Film in Review: The Edges of Realism', pp. 175–176.
28. Philip Lopate, 'Kiarostami Close Up', p. 38. Riccardo Zipoli, 'Analisi delle poesie', appendix to Abbas Kiarostami, *Con il vento* (Milan, Editrice Il Castoro, 2001), pp. 267–268, also points out the significant analogy between the director's use of these empty spaces in his films and in his poems.
29. Carlos F. Heredero, 'Abbas Kiarostami: más allá de la realidad, más cerca de lo real', p. 84.
30. Quoted in Bruno Roberti (ed.), *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 45.
31. Youssef Ishaghpour, *Le Réel*, p. 43.
32. Jonathan Romney, '*Close Up/Namayeh Nazdik*', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 7, n. 12, December 1997, p. 41, and François Niney, *L'Epreuve du réel à l'écran. Essai sur le principe de réalité documentaire* (Brussels, Editions De Boeck, 2000), p. 315.
33. Stéphane Goudet, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami: Manipulations', p. 95. Makhmalbaf's version in his interview with Stéphane Goudet, 'Entretien avec Mohsen Makhmalbaf: Prises de position et prises de pouvoir', p. 22, is substantially different: 'This was the second sequence that was filmed, right after the trial. In fact, while we were on the motorbike, Sabzian was telling me the whole time that he didn't want to take part in the film, and I was trying to convince him that it would be worthwhile.'
34. François Niney, *L'Epreuve du réel à l'écran*, p. 114.
35. Hamid Dabashi, *Close Up*, p. 67.
36. Regarding *The Night it Rained*, see Mamad Haghighat and Frédéric Sabouraud, *Histoire du cinéma iranien, 1900–1999*, pp. 98–99.
37. It is right to point out, as does the most interested party, that Makhmalbaf had already carried out in *The Marriage of the Blessed* (*Arusi-ye khuban*, 1989), i.e. before *Close-Up* was made, certain experiments in self-referentiality. See Makhmalbaf's comments to Stéphane Goudet, 'Entretien avec Mohsen Makhmalbaf: Prises de position et prises de pouvoir', p. 22.
38. Hormuz Kéy, *Le Cinéma iranien*, pp. 170–172.
39. See his comments to Hormuz Kéy, ibid., pp. 170–171, and Danièle Parra, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami, l'humaniste', p. 21.
40. Comments to Miriam Rosen, 'The Camera of Art: An Interview with Abbas Kiarostami', p. 39.
41. 'Intervista con Abbas Kiarostami', p. 166.
42. See, for example, the interview 'Abbas Kiarostami: L'humain m'importe plus que la pellicule', *L'Humanité*, 19th May 1997.
43. It is appropriate to make clear from the outset that the real title of the film, translated literally from the original Farsi, is *Life and Nothing More …*, and not *And Life Goes On*. The fortuitous coincidence of titles with Bertrand Tavernier's excellent film, *La Vie et rien d'autre* (1999), which was still being shown around the world, led those responsible for the *Un certain regard* section of the Cannes Festival – at which Kiarostami's film was shown – to suggest using a different title for international distribution. For this reason I have chosen to maintain its real title, which is in addition the one most commonly used in the United States.
44. Original press-book for the film distributed by the Farabi Cinema Foundation, p. 5.
45. Thierry Jousse and Serge Toubiana, 'Un Film n'a pas de passeport: Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami', p. 31. See also his comments to Alison Culliford, 'Parables and Popcorn: Abbas Kiarostami', *High Life*, December 1999, p. 88: 'From that moment onwards my view of life changed. Up until that day I had never quite understood the meaning of life and death in that way, but you must also add to that the fact of my own age.'
46. 'The Earthquake', *sura* 99; quoted in Majid Fakhry's translation, *An Interpretation of the Qur'an*, p. 630. When he was duly asked about it by Jean-Luc Nancy, *L'Evidence du film: Abbas Kiarostami*, pp. 92–95, Kiarostami said that he had not thought about this *sura* while he was making *Life and Nothing More …* However, he says that he knows it by

heart and considers it one of the most beautiful in the Qur'an and that he had even in the 1970s thought of basing a film on it.

47. Comments to Laurence Giavarini and Thierry Jousse, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami', p. 34.
48. Philippe Piazzo and Frédéric Richard, 'Jusqu'au bout de la route: Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami', p. 30.
49. Nassia Hamid, 'Near and Far. Interview', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 7, n. 2, February 1997, p. 24. Kiarostami has insisted over and over that his objectives were different: 'Television does its work and I do mine. I don't show dead bodies as television does because I don't make documentary reports. After the earthquake I waited five months before starting to shoot this film because I wanted to be absolutely sure about what I wanted the camera to show'; Laurence Giavarini and Thierry Jousse, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami', p. 34.
50. See, for example, Yann Tobin, '*Et la vie continue* ... Où est le film de mon ami?', *Positif*, n. 380, October 1992, p. 28, and Nick James, '*And Life Goes On .../Zendegi Va Digar Hich*', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 6, n. 10, October 1996, p. 35.
51. This shot takes on greater relevance in the light of the reappearance of the zig-zag path in the final sequence of the film, analysed below, which confirms that we are dealing with something more than a mere whim or desire for self-reference on the part of the director. Mojdeh Famili, 'Le Jardin du paradis dans la miniature persane et l'arbre dans le cinéma de Kiarostami', in Jean Mottet (ed.), *L'Arbre dans le paysage* (Seyssel, Editions Champ Vallon, 2002), p. 155, appropriately highlights how even the route taken by the boy in *Bread and Alley* had the same form – as Kiarostami d in an interview published in Iran, the precise details of which are not, however, provided by the author.
52. Houshang Golmakani, '*Zendegi va digar hich (Life and Nothing More)*', *Cinemaya. The Asian Film Quarterly*, n. 15, Spring 1992, p. 32.
53. Stéphane Goudet, 'La Reprise. Retour sur l'ensemble de l'oeuvre d'Abbas Kiarostami', *Positif*, n. 408, February 1995, p. 10; Marco Dalla Gassa, *Abbas Kiarostami*, pp. 89–90.
54. Jonathan Rosenbaum, 'Iranian Sights: *And Life Goes On ...*', *Chicago Reader*, 23rd October 1992.
55. 'Quotations from Abbas Kiarostami, 1978–1999', p. 24.
56. Marco Dalla Gassa, *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 88.
57. Philip Lopate, 'Kiarostami Close Up' p. 38.
58. Quoted from the translation by Martin Turner and Abbas Faiz, 'Shorab Sepehri's *Water's Footfall*', *Comparative Criticism*, vol. 8 (1986), pp. 261–277, included in www.50connect.co.uk/turner/persian/persianSS13.html.
59. Jean-Luc Nancy, *L'Evidence du film: Abbas Kiarostami*, pp. 73–75.

60. Laurence Giavarini and Thierry Jousse, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami', p. 34.
61. Marco Dalla Gassa, *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 86.
62. Laurence Giavarini and Thierry Jousse, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami', p. 35.
63. Interview included in Jean-Luc Nancy, *L'Evidence du film: Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 84.
64. Ibid., p. 82.
65. Michel Ciment, 'Trente questions à Abbas Kiarostami sur ses photographies', p. 17. More recently he has also said that, for him, 'the only love that grows stronger day by day, while other loves grow weaker, is the love for nature'. And he added: 'As I often say to my friends, this is the only reason I fear death.' See Youssef Ishaghpour, 'La Photographie, le cinéma et le paysage. Dialogue', *Positif*, n. 491, January 2002, p. 69.
66. Hamid Dabashi, *Close Up*, p. 74.
67. Youssef Ishaghpour, *Le Réel*, p. 23.
68. Ibid., p. 79.
69. Jean-Luc Nancy, *L'Evidence du film: Abbas Kiarostami*, pp. 80–81.
70. Youssef Ishaghpour, *La Miniature persane. Les couleurs de la lumière: le miroir et le jardin* (Tours, Editions Farrago, 1999), p. 12.
71. Ibid., p. 31.
72. He uses this expression in, for example, his review of *Taste of Cherry*, 'Fill in the Blanks', *Chicago Reader*, 29th May 1998.
73. Philippe Piazzo and Frédéric Richard, 'Jusqu'au bout de la route: Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami', p. 30.
74. Michel Cieutat, '*Zendegi edamé darad* (*Et la vie continue*)', *Positif*, n. 378, July-August 1992, p. 99.
75. Mojdeh Famili, 'Le Jardin du paradis dans la miniature persane et l'arbre dans le cinéma de Kiarostami', pp. 155–156.
76. *Hichestan* is a neologism invented by the poet that could be translated literally as 'nothingland'; see Dariush Shayegan's prologue to Sohrab Sepehri, *Les Pas de l'eau*, pp. 15–16.
77. Bruno Roberti, 'Il sogno della verità e la verità dei sogni', in Bruno Roberti (ed.), *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 6.
78. Philippe Piazzo and Frédéric Richard, 'Jusqu'au bout de la route: Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami', p. 30.
79. Youssef Ishaghpour, *Le Réel*, pp. 82–83.
80. Yann Tobin, '*Et la vie continue* ... Où est le film de mon ami?', p. 29.
81. *Sureh*, n. 48, June–August 1993, pp. 49–50; quoted by Hamid Dabashi, 'Re-reading Reality', p. 66, which gives a detailed account of the critical reception of the film in Iran.
82. *Sureh*, ibid., p. 53; quoted by Hamid Dabashi, ibid., pp. 66–67.
83. *Film*, n. 143, June 1993, p. 90; quoted by Hamid Dabashi, ibid., p. 67. Although Asier Aranzubia is undoubtedly right to point out ('Abbas

Kiarostami: la trilogía de Koker', p. 20), how the use of Vivaldi's music at various times in the film (and not only in the final sequence) 'seems to wish to vindicate that cultural cross-breeding which the authorities in Iran so firmly reject', we should nevertheless bear in mind that Kiarostami had been using European classical music from time to time in his films right from the beginning of his career, in *Bread and Alley*, *Solution No. 1*, *Toothache* and *The Experience* (in the latter film, in a symbolic sequence, the young protagonist listens to an operatic aria on the radio at night). Kiarostami admitted, however, that he did come to doubt the appropriateness of using Vivaldi in *Life and Nothing More* ..., given the virulent reaction that it provoked; see Philippe Piazzo and Frédéric Richard, 'Jusqu'au bout de la route: Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami', p. 32.

84. The critic is referring to the physical appearance of the film's protagonist, Farhad Kheradmand, a sociologist friend of Kiarostami's who had never acted before.
85. *Film*, n. 143, June 1993, p. 94; quoted by Hamid Dabashi, ibid., pp. 68–69. Regarding the Iranian cinema press in the immediate post-revolutionary period, see the short but very interesting article by Hamid Naficy, 'Cultural Dynamics of Iranian Post-Revolutionary Film Periodicals', *Iranian Studies*, vol. 25, n. 3–4, 1992, pp. 67–73.
86. Sussan Siavoshi, 'Cultural Politics and the Islamic Republic', pp. 514, 519 and 522.
87. Shahzad Rahmati and Majid Sedqi, 'A Nest for the Different Ones', *Film International*, n.. 18, Summer 1997, p. 19.
88. Hamid Dabashi, *Close Up*, p. 71.
89. See, among the first reviews rushed out after the film's screening at Cannes, the influential articles by Jacques Siclier, 'Le Voyage en Iran', *Le Monde*, 9th May 1992, and Olivier Seguret, 'Et la terre a tremblé', *Libération*, 9th–10th May 1992.
90. Philippe Piazzo and Frédéric Richard, 'Jusqu'au bout de la route: Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami', p. 32, where he admits a certain similarity between the situations described in his film and those in *Germania anno zero*. See, however, the penetrating comments of Asier Aranzubia on the subject, 'Abbas Kiarostami: la trilogía de Koker', p. 20.
91. See Shohreh Golparian, 'The Emperor and I: Abbas Kiarostami Meets Akira Kurosawa', *Film International*, vol. 1, n. 4, Autumn 1993, p. 4.
92. The project presented to Karmitz in January 1993 was entitled *Love and the Wall*: set in Berlin after the fall of the Wall, the film was about a complex relationship against the background of Iranian exiles in Germany, and was intended as an overt tribute to Sohrab Shahid Saless, who was to have played himself in the film. Kiarostami's original script was first translated into French, 'L'Amour et le mur', in *Positif*, n. 442, December 1997, pp. 101–104, and then into English, 'Love and the Wall', *Film International*, n. 21, Summer 1998, pp. 61–65.

93. Abbas Kiarostami, 'Au travers des oliviers', *Trafic*, n. 7, Summer 1993, pp. 18–30.
94. Ibid., p. 18.
95. Michel Ciment and Stéphane Goudet, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami: Les six faces du cube', *Positif*, n. 408, February 1995, p. 14.
96. Marco Dalla Gassa, *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 97. As Dalla Gassa himself observes, *The Experience* – in a clear precedent in many ways in this film – was not, strictly speaking, a love story, in that a relationship never develops between Mamad and the girl, who represents throughout the film a mere object of desire. In addition, we should note that in his first independent production Kiarostami entirely abandons the world of childhood that had characterized his work for Kanun, a convincing confirmation of his claim that he had never intended to become a specialist in children's films.
97. The shooting itself went on for eight months, as it was necessary to re-film certain sequences when the negative had been irretrievably damaged in the processing laboratory. See Michel Ciment and Stéphane Goudet, ibid., p. 18, and above all the article by Houshang Golmakani written at the same time the film was made, 'La Terra Trema: Kiarostami Makes his New Film', *Film International*, vol. 1, n. 3, Summer 1993, p. 60.
98. Mamad Haghighat, 'Droits légitimes: Le suicide ou la vie. Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami', *Film International*, n. 18, Summer–Autumn 1997, p. 40. See also Serge Toubiana, 'Le Goût du caché: Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami', p. 68, and Godfrey Cheshire, 'Abbas Kiarostami: Seeking a Home', p. 211.
99. Gabriele Pedullà, Bruno Roberto and Francesco Suriano, 'Conversazione con Abbas Kiarostami', p. 422.
100. Godfrey Cheshire, 'Abbas Kiarostami: Seeking a Home', p. 215.
101. Godfrey Cheshire, 'Abbas Kiarostami: A Cinema of Questions', pp. 41–42.
102. David Oubiña, 'Algunas reflexiones sobre un plano en un film de un cineasta iraní', p. 21.
103. This acute observation was first made by Alain Bergala, '*Expérience*', in Laurent Roth (ed.), *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 94.
104. For Marco Dalla Gassa, *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 98, the identification devices used by Kiarostami were even more powerful and effective than those he used with Sabzian in *Close Up*.
105. Indeed, as far back as 1978 Kiarostami had declared: 'In casting I have always tried to select those who are morally and psychologically close to the film characters. At times, I have even changed my story's personages to coordinate them with the players.' See 'Quotations from Abbas Kiarostami, 1978–1999', p. 23.
106. Abbas Kiarostami, 'Au travers des oliviers', p. 26.
107. Jacques Gesternkorn, 'Voyage avec Kiarostami: *Au travers des oliviers*', *Génériques*, n. 2, Spring–Summer 1995, p. 84.

108. See Kiarostami's own comments on this sequence in Michel Ciment and Stéphane Goudet, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami: Les six faces du cube', p. 16.
109. David Oubiña, 'Algunas reflexiones sobre un plano en un film de un cineasta iraní', p. 24.
110. Hamid Dabashi, 'Re-reading Reality', p. 79.
111. Interview with Stéphane Goudet, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami: Manipulations', p. 96.
112. Alain Masson, '*Au travers des oliviers*: La répetition ou l'amour récompensé', *Positif*, n. 408, February 1995, p. 7.
113. Michel Ciment and Stéphane Goudet, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami: Les six faces du cube', p. 18.
114. Laurent Roth, 'Abbas Kiarostami: Le dompteur de regard', in Laurent Roth (ed.), *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 13.
115. The Qur'an, 24–35.
116. Hamid Dabashi, 'Re-reading Reality', pp. 82–83. Regarding the symbolism of the Garden of Paradise in the Persian tradition and its possible relationship with Kiarostami's films, see Mojdeh Famili, 'Le Jardin du paradis dans la miniature persane et l'arbre dans le cinéma de Kiarostami', pp. 152–159.
117. Alain Masson, '*Au travers des oliviers*: La répetition ou l'amour récompensé', p. 8.
118. Hervé Aubron, 'Les Fileurs d'horizons. Lointain de l'interdit, lointain mineur chez Kiarostami', *Vertigo*, n. 18, 1999, p. 36. Here again we would have to go back to *The Experience* to find a real precedent in the director's work.
119. Laurent Roth, 'Abbas Kiarostami: Le dompteur de regard', in Laurent Roth (ed.), *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 16.
120. David Oubiña, 'Algunas reflexiones sobre un plano en un film de un cineasta iraní', p. 21.
121. Hamid Dabashi, 'Re-reading Reality', pp. 81–82, and Olivier De Bruyn, '*Zire darakhtan zeyton (Au travers des oliviers)*', *Positif*, n. 401–402, July–August 1994, p. 84.
122. See the reviews by Naghmeh Samini and Ahmad Talebinezhad in *Film*, n. 167, November 1994, p. 61, and n. 168, December 1994, p. 104, respectively. Quoted by Hamid Dabashi, 'Re-reading Reality', p. 70.
123. David Oubiña, 'Algunas reflexiones sobre un plano en un film de un cineasta iraní', pp. 21–22.
124. Ibid., p. 22.
125. Ibid., p. 21.
126. Marco Dalla Gassa, *Abbas Kiarostami*, pp. 110–111.
127. David Oubiña, ibid., p. 21. Some relevant comments about this disconcerting opening sequence can be found in Marco Dalla Gassa, *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 145; Casey Williamson, 'Art Matters: The Films of Abbas Kiarostami', in Rose Issa and Sheila Whitaker (eds.), *Life and Art: The New Iranian Cinema* (London, British Film Institute, 1999), p. 98; and Deborah Young, 'Abbas Kiarostami', in Peter Cowie (ed.), *Variety International Film Guide 1996* (London and Boston, Hamlyn/Focal Press, 1995), p. 31.
128. Stéphane Bouquet, '*Au travers des oliviers*', in Laurent Roth (ed.), *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 132. On the reflective dimension of the film, see Marco Dalla Gassa, *Abbas Kiarostami*, pp. 149-150.
129. David Oubiña, ibid., pp. 20–25.
130. *Naqd-e sinema*, n. 1, Summer 1994, p. 88. Quoted by Hamid Dabashi, ibid., p. 71.
131. Quoted in Shahmed Rastin, 'Abbas Kiarostami: Simple and Complicated: Part Two', *Film International*, n. 26–27, Autumn 1999–Winter 2000, p. 106.
132. The comment that he puts into the mouth of one of the aspiring actors in the improvised casting at the start of *Through the Olive Trees*, questioning the importance of making a film that afterwards they probably won't be able to see, undoubtedly reflects this concern on Kiarostami's part and carries a double meaning; it refers to the difficulty in seeing films outside the major cities, but also to the usual ravages of censorship.
133. *Cahiers du Cinéma*, n. 493, July–August 1995, pp. 67–114.
134. Guillermo Cabrera Infante, 'A través del mundo de Abbas Kiarostami', *El País/Babelia*, 17th December 1994, pp. 2–3; and Peter Handke, 'Die Geschichte Hossein und Tahereh: eine Annäherung an den iranischen Cineasten Abbas Kiarostami – anhand seines letzen Films', *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 9th September 1995.
135. I have not been able to find the original text of this letter, but it is mentioned by, among many others, Marco Della Nave, *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 17, and Injy El-Kashef and Mohamed El-Assyouti in their interview with Kiarostami for the Egyptian daily *Al-Ahram*: see 'Strategic Lies', *al-Ahram Weekly Online*, n. 556, 18th –24th October 2001 [www.ahram.org.eg/weekly/2001/556/cu1.htm].

Chapter Four

1. Comments to Michel Ciment and Stéphane Goudet, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami: Un approche existentialiste de la vie', p. 83.
2. 'A Debate with Abbas Kiarostami', p. 49.
3. '[In Iran] The only positive image of Afghans is found in modern Iranian films', say Farhad Khosrokhavar and Olivier Roy, *Iran: Comment sortir d'une révolution religieuse*, p. 253. The much talked-about precedent of *The Cyclist* (*Baysikelran*, 1987) by Mohsen Makhmalbaf, alongside much

more recent films such as *Jomeh* (*Jomeh*, Hassan Yekpatanah, 2000) and *Baran* (*Baran*, Majid Majidi, 2001), *The White Balloon* and *Taste of Cherry* itself, constitute some of the few exceptions to the negative and discriminatory opinion of Afghans generally held in modern Iranian society. *Kandahar* (*Safar-e Kandahar*, 2001) and *The Afghan Alphabet* (*Alef-bay-e Afghan*, 2002), Makhmalbaf's two films that tackle the problems of the neighbouring country head-on, obviously fall into a different category.

4. Coordinated by Sarah Moon, *Lumière and Company* was financed by French, Swedish and Spanish investors, and assembled the following film-makers, in addition to Kiarostami: Merzak Allouache, Theo Angelopoulos, Vicente Aranda, Gabriel Axel, Bigas Luna, John Boorman, Youssef Chahine, Alain Corneau, Raymond Depardon, Constantin Costa-Gavras, Francis Girod, Peter Greenaway, Lasse Hallström, Michael Haneke, Hugh Hudson, James Ivory, Gaston Kaboré, Cédric Klapisch, Andrei Konchalovski, Patrice Leconte, Claude Lelouch, Spike Lee, David Lynch, Claude Miller, Idrissa Ouedraogo, Arthur Penn, Lucian Pintilie, Jacques Rivette, Helma Sanders, Jerry Schatzberg, Nadine Trintignant, Fernando Trueba, Liv Ullman, Jaco Van Dormael, Régis Wargnier, Wim Wenders, Kiju Yoshida and Zhang Yimou.
5. See, for example, the comments of Nacho Cagiga Gimeno, '... Y dos huevos fritos (Reflexiones e impresiones sobre la aportación de Abbas Kiarostami a *Lumière y Compañía*)', *Banda Aparte*, n. 16, October 1999, p. 78.
6. Bahman Kiarostami, the director's younger son, who has frequently worked with him on his films, had already made in 1993 *Journey to the Land of the Traveller* and was just beginning on what is now a promising career as a documentary film-maker. The elder son, Ahmad, has never become involved with film-making and at present lives in California, where he works in the IT industry.
7. The experiment was undoubtedly inspired by the magnificent series of photographs taken by Nasrollah Kasraian on the Damavand mountain (*Damavand*; Tehran, 1992), greatly admired by Kiarostami, as he recognizes in 'La Photographie', in Laurent Roth (ed.), *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 39.
8. 'Whenever a location doesn't fit my ideas, I change my ideas', Kiarostami jokingly declared, emphasizing the importance he places on the right locations; quoted by Godfrey Cheshire, 'Abbas Kiarostami: Seeking a Home', p. 216. Referring more specifically to the preparations before shooting *Taste of Cherry*, which would provide the basis for *The Project*, Kiarostami tells us that, 'On that occasion my son and I got in the car and went straight to work at the location where we intended to shoot. It was a new experience for me, in that some of my instincts were directed by the space around me'; Michel Ciment and Stéphane Goudet, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami: Un approche existentialiste de la vie', p. 84.
9. Godfrey Cheshire, ibid., p. 221.

10. See Qur'an, 44–8: 'There is no other god but He. He gives life and causes to die'; quoted in Majid Fakhry's translation, *An Interpretation of the* Qur'an, p. 501.
11. See, for example, Serge Toubiana, 'Le Goût du caché: Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami', p. 67; Mamad Haghighat, 'Droits légitimes: Le suicide ou la vie. Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami', p. 40; and David Sterritt, With Borrowed Eyes: Abbas Kiarostami Talks', p. 26. The complete quotation, taken from E. M. Cioran, *Syllogismes de l'amertume* (Paris, Editions Gallimard, 1952), p. 74, runs as follows: 'I live only because I can die whenever I wish: without the *idea* of suicide, I would have killed myself long ago.'
12. Information about the long process of preparation for the film is included in the interview 'Abbas Kiarostami: L'humain m'importe plus que la pellicule'.
13. Before being given its definitive title, the film was also called *The Eclipse*, further proof of Kiarostami's many areas of indecision during the final phase of the project.
14. The prize was, however, shared with *The Eel* (*Unagi*, 1997) by Shohei Imamura. On the ups and downs of the production work on *Taste of Cherry*, see Marco Della Nave, *Abbas Kiarostami*, pp. 112–114, and also Kiarostami's own comments to Michel Ciment and Stéphane Goudet, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami: Un approche existentialiste de la vie', p. 83.
15. Marco Dalla Gassa, *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 173.
16. Serge Toubiana, 'Le Goût du caché : Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami', p. 68. Elsewhere Kiarostami expanded on these opinions: 'Sometimes I envy the theatre, especially that particular moment when the play finishes, and while the audience is still captivated by the story, the curtain rises and the actor who has just died gets up and comes forward to greet them. In film-making that is not possible, because the spectator forms a symbiotic relationship with the character, and when he leaves the cinema he is still thinking about that character, to the point where he forgets the main theme of the film, and remembers only the hero, the actor, the character'; see Bruno Roberti and Babak Karimi, 'Stiamo raccontando una favola', *Filmcritica*, vol. 47, n. 476–477, June–July 1997, p. 315.
17. Laura Mulvey, 'Kiarostami's Uncertainty Principle', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 8, n. 6, June 1998, p. 26.
18. Laura Mulvey, ibid., pp. 25–26.
19. Marco Dalla Gassa, *Abbas Kiarostami*, pp. 170–171.
20. Kiarostami has explained on many occasions his liking for cars as motifs in his films. To quote just one example, interesting because it establishes a parallel with his characters, see his comments about *Taste of Cherry* made to Michel Ciment and Stéphane Goudet, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami:

Un approche existentialiste de la vie', p. 85: 'One day I realized that I don't just spend a long time in the car, but that some of these times are very important. My interior life is more intense in the car than at home, where I don't stop for a minute and I don't have time to think. But as soon as you get in your car, with or without a seatbelt, you are immobilized, no-one bothers you, there's no telephone, no fridge, no-one who comes to see you. That's why I really do work while I'm behind the steering wheel: it's the only office I can have, a very private space, like a little house, where there is nothing superfluous, and besides, the huge screen provides an endless filmic travelling.'

21. Olivier Kohn, '*Le Goût de la cerise*: Chemin faisant', *Positif*, n. 442, December 1997, p. 80.
22. Michel Ciment and Stéphane Goudet, ibid., p. 89.
23. Mojdeh Famili, 'Le Jardin du paradis dans la miniature persane et l'arbre dans le cinéma de Kiarostami', p. 165.
24. Jean-Louis Leutrat, '*Le Goût de la cerise*: Deux cent mille tomans', *Positif*, n. 442, December 1997, p. 82.
25. Jean-Luc Nancy, *L'Evidence du film: Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 45.
26. Youssef Ishaghpour, *Le Réel*, p. 89.
27. Youssef Ishaghpour, *Le Réel*, p. 93. The same idea resurfaces in David Walsh, 'Despair, Hope, Life', *World Socialist Web Site*, 11th April 1998 [www.wsws.org/arts/1998/apr1998/cher-all.shtml].
28. Marco Della Nave, *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 117.
29. Michèle Levieux, 'Kiarostami veut garder la vie en éveil et rien de plus', *L'Humanité*, 26th November 1997.
30. The expression is from Shorab Sepehri's *The Sound of Water's Footsteps*, quoted from the translation by Martin Turner and Abbas Faiz, 'Shorab Sepehri's *Water's Footfall*', *Comparative Criticism*, pp. 261–277.
31. Fabrice Revault D'Allonnes, 'L'Epuisé: A propos du *Goût de la cerise* d'Abbas Kiarostami', *La Lettre du Cinéma*, n. 5, Spring 1998, p. 56.
32. 'We need to rinse our eyes and see everything in a different way', wrote Sepehri in *The Sound of Water's Footsteps*, and it would be difficult not to imagine that we hear this echoed in the taxidermist's suggestion. Mostafa Mahmudi, in 'Seeking a Pretext to Continue to Live' [www.salamiran.org/ Media/IranNews/990629.html], actually interprets the whole film as a reworking of this verse by Sepehri.
33. This feature is, moreover, repeated over and over in Kiarostami's photographic work, where the director often uses a composition in which the earth takes up five-sixths of the image, compared to only one-sixth for the sky. See Michel Ciment, 'Trente questions à Abbas Kiarostami sur ses photographies', pp. 24–25.
34. Concerning the use of landscape in *Taste of Cherry*, see, among others, Marco Dalla Gassa, *Abbas Kiarostami*, pp. 171–172; Marco Della Nave, *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 115; and Hormuz Kéy, *Le Cinéma iranien*, 206.
35. Bruno Roberti and Babak Karimi, 'Stiamo raccontando una favola', p. 315.
36. Laura Mulvey, 'Kiarostami's Uncertainty Principle', p. 26. Kiarostami confirms the choice he made: 'I shot [the film] in autumn, the season when nature is dying, so that the setting would reflect the character and his state of mind at that time'; comments to Michel Ciment and Stéphane Goudet, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami: Un approche existentialiste de la vie', p. 83.
37. See, for example, the comments confided to Godfrey Cheshire, 'Abbas Kiarostami: Seeking a Home', pp. 224–225.
38. The theme of suicide had already appeared in *The Report*, a film that shares with *Taste of Cherry* an undeniable sense of despair and emerges again in a project that Kiarostami announced will be a forthcoming film: 'It is once more the story of someone who, over a period of twelve hours, drives his car here and there, crossing mountains, coasts and plains. And this is also about someone who is saying farewell to life'; Youssef Ishaghpour, 'La Photographie, le cinéma et le paysage. Dialogue', p. 68.
39. Serge Toubiana, 'Le Goût du caché : Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami', p. 68. There are innumerable studies about the poetry of Omar Khayyam, but the classic monograph by Ali Dashti, *In Search of Omar Khayyam* (London, George Allen & Unwin, 1971; original edition, *Dami ba Khayyam*, Tehran, Moassese-e Chap va Enteshar-e Amir-e Kabir, 1966), has lost none of its interest and usefulness.
40. Michel Ciment and Stéphane Goudet, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami: Un approche existentialiste de la vie', p. 84.
41. To quote just a few examples, see the reviews – taken from a wide range of French publications – that are listed under this epigraph of 'A Hymn in Praise of Life' in the appendix to the monograph *Le Goût de la cerise*, *L'Avant-Scène.Cinéma*, n. 471, April 1998, pp. 71–73.
42. David Walsh, 'Despair, Hope, Life'.
43. The expression is Kiarostami's, in Bruno Roberti and Babak Karimi, 'Stiamo raccontando una favola', p. 313.
44. Jean-Marc Lalanne, '*Le Goût de la cerise*', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, n. 514, June 1997, p. 22.
45. Bruno Roberti and Babak Karimi, ibid., pp. 313 and 316.
46. Sadegh Hedayat, *Taraneha-e Khayyam* (Khayyam's Quatrains) (Tehran, 1934), quoted from its translation as 'Introducción' to the Spanish edition of the *Robaiyyat* (Madrid, Ediciones Hiperión, 1993), pp. 31 and 44–45.
47. Youssef Ishaghpour, 'La Photographie, le cinéma et le paysage. Dialogue', p. 64. Concerning Sadegh Hedayat, Homa Katouzian's study, *Sadeq Hedayat: The Life and Literature of an Iranian Writer* (London and New York, I. B. Tauris, 1991) and the brilliant essay by Ishaghpour himself, *Tombeau de*

Sadegh Hedayat (Tours, Editions Farrago, 1999) are particularly useful.

48. Youssef Ishaghpour, *Le Réel*, p. 88.
49. Sadegh Hedayat, *The Blind Owl* (New York, Grove Weidenfeld, 1989), pp. 91, 107, 116 and 124.
50. Ibid., p. 90.
51. Youssef Ishaghpour, *Le Réel*, p. 87.
52. Marco Dalla Gassa, *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 170.
53. Godfrey Cheshire, 'Abbas Kiarostami: Seeking a Home', pp. 223–224. The writer is referring to Badii's reply to the seminarian, when the latter states categorically that suicide is contrary to divine law: 'I already know that suicide is one of the mortal sins, but so is not being happy. And when you're unhappy, you hurt other people. Isn't that a sin? Hurting other people, isn't that a sin? Hurting your family, your friends, hurting yourself … isn't that a sin? Or are you saying that if I hurt you, that's not a sin, but it is a sin if I kill myself?'
54. Quoted in 'L'Amour et le Mur', *Positif*, n. 442, December 1997, p. 102, although here I have preferred to use the English translation of the same text by Minu Moshiri: 'Love and the Wall', *Film International*, n. 21, Summer 1998, p. 62.
55. Jean-Louis Leutrat, '*Le Goût de la cerise*: Deux cent mille tomans', p. 82.
56. David Walsh, 'Despair, Hope, Life'.
57. Michel Ciment and Stéphane Goudet, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami: Un approche existentialiste de la vie', p. 89.
58. Comments to Serge Toubiana, 'Le Goût du caché: Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami', p. 69.
59. Comments to Michel Ciment and Stéphane Goudet, ibid., p. 87.
60. Michel Ciment and Stéphane Goudet, ibid., p. 88. See also Godfrey Cheshire, 'Abbas Kiarostami: Seeking a Home', p. 225.
61. Michel Ciment and Stéphane Goudet, ibid., p. 87.
62. Mehrnad Saeed-Vafa, in Mehrnad Saeed-Vafa and Jonathan Rosenbaum, 'Abbas Kiarostami: A Dialogue Between the Authors (Chicago, September 3, 2001)', *Senses of Cinema*, n. 17, November–December 2001 [www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/01/17/kiarostami_authors.html].
63. Godfrey Cheshire, '*Taste of Cherry*: Journey to the End of Night', *Film International*, n. 17, Summer 1997, p. 27. Cheshire does not get the nuances of the different origins of Badii's interlocutors exactly right: the soldier is a Kurd; the seminarian and the site guard are Afghans; the taxidermist belongs to the Azeri Turkish minority from the northwest of Iran.
64. Marco Dalla Gassa, *Abbas Kiarostami*, pp. 176–177. On this subject, see the director's comments in the interview with Michèle Levieuxin *L'Humanité*, 26th November 1997: 'Badii was born in Iran, he belongs to modern-day Iran and he meets people who are likewise part of this same Iran. Whether they are Kurds, Afghans or Turks, they all work, they all have a past and a life story. We could compare them to rootless trees, transplanted to a different place. But that is the basis on which the new world society is constructed: right now for example there are more Iranians in Los Angeles than in Tehran itself, even if they were born in Tehran, and in Tehran there are huge numbers of people who have come from elsewhere. Geography no longer decides which country its people belong in.'
65. Farhad Khosrokhavar and Olivier Roy, *Iran: Comment sortir d'une révolution religieuse*, p. 239. This part of the book basically rehearses the theses of Farhad Khosrokhavar's article, 'La Mort volontaire en Islam', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, n. 519, December 1997, p. 7.
66. Farhad Khosrokhavar and Olivier Roy, ibid.
67. Ibid., p. 238. On this '*bassij* culture', see also pp. 194–198.
68. Ibid., p. 239.
69. David Walsh, 'Despair, Hope, Life'.
70. Caroline Renard, 'La Nuit: Durée, espace, noir (*Le goût de la cerise*, Abbas Kiarostami, 1997)', *Cinergon*, n. 8–9, 1999–2000, pp. 49–55, has made a detailed study of the function of the few but crucial nocturnal sequences in Kiarostami's films, revealing an association between the night and the idea of the journey, and also of transformation and the achieving of the objectives laid out, which is relevant to any attempt to interpret *Taste of Cherry*.
71. Godfrey Cheshire, '*Taste of Cherry*: Journey to the End of Night', p. 26; Mamad Haghighat and Frédéric Sabouraud, *Histoire du cinéma iranien, 1900–1999*, p. 220; and Elaine Sciolino, *Persian Mirrors. The Elusive Face of Iran* (New York, Touchstone Books, 2000), p. 226.
72. Jean-Marc Lalanne, '*Le gout de la cerise*', p. 22, and Julian Graffy, '*A Taste of Cherry/Ta'ame-gilas*', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 8, n. 6, June 1998, p. 57.
73. Serge Toubiana, 'Le goût du caché: Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami', p. 68.
74. Godfrey Cheshire, '*Taste of Cherry*', p. 27.
75. Michel Ciment and Stéphane Goudet, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami: Un approche existentialiste de la vie', pp. 83–84. 'We had to show the essence, not the reality of death', is Kiarostami's highly significant comment to the camera in Mahmud Behraznia's documentary *Close Up: Kiarostami* (2000).
76. Daniel Fischer, '*Le Goût de la cerise* (Abbas Kiarostami, 1998)', *L'Art du Cinéma*, n. 19–20, Summer 1998, p. 20.
77. The information is from Shahzad Rahmati, 'The Story of a Victory', *Film International*, n. 17, Summer 1997, p. 24. Khayyam's poem is quoted in the translation by Peter Avery and John Heath-Stubbs, *The Ruba'iyat of Omar Khayyam* (London, Penguin Books, 1981), p. 62.
78. David Fischer, ibid., pp. 20–21, and Caroline Renard, 'La nuit: Durée, espace, noir', pp. 54–55.

79. Marco Della Nave, *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 119.
80. Kiarostami's indecision about this continued even after the film was screened at Cannes, and he went so far as to conduct a curious kind of trial when the film was previewed in Bologna in October 1997, which consisted of showing the film on different occasions with and without the epilogue to test the public's reaction. Although apparently audiences preferred the version without the epilogue, Kiarostami nevertheless decided to keep it in the definitive version of the film. See Gonül Donmez-Colin, 'Abbas Kiarostami: Life is Nothing but ...', *Celluloid*, vol. 21, n. 1, January 1999, pp. 8–9; Marco Della Nave, *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 120; and Jonathan Rosenbaum, 'Fill in the Blanks', *Chicago Reader*, 29th May 1998.
81. Ali Akbar Mahdi, 'In Dialogue with Kiarostami', *The Iranian*, 25th August 1998; reprinted in abbreviated version in 'I Give Credit to my Audience: Kiarostami's Panel Discussion at the Wexner Center for the Arts', *Film International*, n. 22, Autumn 1998, p. 47. The saying, equivalent to our 'snip snap snout, this tale's told out', is quoted in its literal entirety by Youssef Ishaghpour, *Le Réel*, p. 51, who accepts this explanation by Kiarostami.
82. Comments to Serge Toubiana, 'Le Goût du caché: Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami', p. 69.
83. Bruno Roberti and Babak Karimi, 'Stiamo raccontando una favola', p. 313. See also Michel Ciment and Stéphane Goudet, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami: Un approche existentialiste de la vie', p. 83.
84. So, for example, Robert Safarian, in an interesting and polemical article, 'Simple-Minded Moralism of a Warm and Human Cinema', *Film International*, n. 28, Spring 2000, pp. 63–64, criticizes its inclusion for emphasizing in a rather obvious way what in his opinion constitutes the 'message' of the film: 'Life is better than death'.
85. Michael Price, 'Imagining Life: The Ending of *Taste of Cherry*', *Senses of Cinema*, n. 17, November–December 2001 [www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/01/17/cherry.html].
86. The comments appear in an article by Emmanuel Frois in *Le Figaro*, included in *Le Goût de la cerise*, *L'Avant-Scène.Cinéma*, n. 471, April 1998, p. 72.
87. See Mojdeh Famili, 'Le Jardin du paradis dans la miniature persan et l'arbre dans le cinéma de Kiarostami', p. 163, and Hormuz Kéy, *Le Cinéma iranien*, p. 208.
88. The Qur'an, 25–25. Quoted in Majid Fakhry's translation, *An Interpretation of the Qu'ran*, p. 360. See also the more cryptic *sura* 75 and its allusion to the eclipse of the moon.
89. The Qur'an, 18–99. Quoted in ibid, p. 300.
90. Michael Price, 'Imagining Life: The Ending of *Taste of Cherry*'.
91. Michel Ciment and Stéphane Goudet, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami: Un approche existentialiste de la vie', p. 89.
92. As Michael Price points out (ibid.), this black screen refers directly back to a previous one, which frequently goes unnoticed by audiences, but which constitutes the actual beginning of the film: before the first images of *Taste of Cherry* appear on screen, a caption on a black screen reads: 'In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful'.
93. Michael Price (ibid.) develops an interesting argument in which he situates the character of Badii against the backdrop of the figure of the martyr in the Islamic and specifically the Iranian (Shi'ite) tradition.
94. Michael Price, ibid.
95. See Shahzad Rahmati, 'The Story of Victory', pp. 24–25, and Godfrey Cheshire, 'Abbas Kiarostami: Seeking a Home', pp. 213–214.
96. *Close Up: Kiarostami* (2000), the documentary by Mahmud Behraznia, includes an exit poll of audiences at one of the film's showings in Tehran, which amply demonstrates this.
97. See Farhad Khosrokhavar and Olivier Roy, *Irán: de la revolución a la reforma*, pp. 123 and 191, and Hamid Naficy, 'Islamizing Film Culture in Iran: A Post-Khatami Update', in Richard Tapper (ed.), *The New Iranian Cinema: Politics, Representation and Identity*, p. 56.
98. Seifollah Daad, 'Today's Iranian Cinema', *Jashnavareh. Daily Bulletin of the Fajr Film Festival*, n. 1, 2nd February 2000, p. 15.
99. Ahmad Talebinejad, 'Honest to God, He Is Not a Copy-Cat: An Interview with Jafar Panahi', *Film International*, n. 18, Summer 1997, p. 47.
100. For example, Yves Thoraval, *Les Cinémas de Moyen-Orient (Iran-Egypte-Turquie)* (Paris, Editions Séguier, 2000), p. 84.
101. On the relevance of these important films in the context of modern Iranian cinema, see Alberto Elena, 'Mitades ocultas: el cine iraní en la era Jatami', *Otrocampo. Estudios sobre cine*, n. 6, March 2002 [www.otrocampo.com/6/erajatami.html]. A complementary view of the same period can be found in Hamid Dabashi, 'Persian Blues', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 12, n. 1, January 2002, pp. 32–34.
102. The expression is Godfrey Cheshire's, 'How to Read Kiarostami', *Cineaste*, vol. 25, n. 4, September 2000, p. 9; Cheshire makes a timely criticism of the understandable but flawed tendency to interpret Kiarostami's films in terms of Western patterns, references and perspectives, which have little or nothing to do with the development of his film-making career. In a later text, 'Poetry and Sufism: A Guide to Understanding Kiarostami's Latest Film', *The Independent Weekly*, 13th December 2000, Cheshire again confronts Jonathan Rosenbaum and his attempt to turn Kiarostami into a 'global' film-maker: 'Pardon me, but I would say Steven Spielberg and Majid Majidi are the ones addressing global culture. I think Kiarostami's ultimately addressing *himself* – and perhaps a few other Gnostics.'

Chapter Five

1. Thierry Jousse and Serge Toubiana, 'Un Film n'a pas de passeport: Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami', p. 30.
2. Heike Hurst, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami', *Jeune Cinéma*, n. 258, November 1999, p. 17.
3. For a more detailed description of the self-references contained in this opening sequence and in a more general way throughout the film, see Marco Dalla Gassa, *Abbas Kiarostami*, pp. 193–194.
4. Alain Bergala, 'L'Os et le pare-brise: A propos de *Le vent nous emportera* d'Abbas Kiarostami', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, n. 541, December 1999, p. 35.
5. Charles Tesson, 'Le Secret magnifique: A propos de *Le vent nous emportera* d'Abbas Kiarostami', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, n. 541, December 1999, p. 27.
6. Marco Dalla Gassa, *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 195.
7. Charles Tesson, ibid., p. 27.
8. Ibid.
9. Godfrey Cheshire, 'How to Read Kiarostami', p. 10.
10. Kent Jones, '*The Wind Will Carry Us*', *Film Comment*, vol. 36, n. 4, March–April 2000, p. 73.
11. Laura Mulvey, '*The Wind Will Carry Us*', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 10, n. 10, October 2000, p. 63.
12. Marco Dalla Gassa, *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 203.
13. David Oubiña, 'Algunas reflexiones sobre un plano en un film de un cineasta iraní', p. 23.
14. Alain Bergala, 'L'Os et le pare-brise: A propos de *Le vent nous emportera* d'Abbas Kiarostami', p. 34.
15. Mamad Haghighat, 'The Audience in Search of Absent Characters: *The Wind Will Carry Us*', *Film International*, n. 25, Summer 1999, p. 31. Kiarostami's complex work with off-screen sound also enabled the director to continue his-by-now traditional exploration of the uses and limits of the soundtrack, returning here to a device he had already used in *Where Is the Friend's House?*: the old woman's long-winded speech in the tea-house is spoken in Kurdish, which for Iranian audiences – as for Behzad himself – would be completely incomprehensible. The subtitles to the sequence in versions shown abroad allow audiences to understand the content of the conversation, but on the other hand they eliminate this effect of strangeness and disorientation. See Houshang Golmakani, 'Siyah Darreh Treasures: *The Wind Will Carry Us*', *Film International*, n. 28, Spring 2000, p. 54.
16. Juan M. Company, 'Espera de lo invisible: *El viento nos llevará*', *El Viejo Topo*, n. 137–138, February–March 2000, p. 103.
17. Interview with David Sterritt, 'With Borrowed Eyes: Abbas Kiarostami Talks', p. 25.
18. Interview with Heike Hurst, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami', p. 19.
19. Juan M. Company, 'Espera de lo invisible: *El viento nos llevará*', p. 103.

20. Quim Casas, 'El cine reinventado: *El viento nos llevará*', *Dirigido. Revista de Cine*, n. 286, January 2000, p. 37.
21. Jared Rapfogel, 'A Mirror Facing a Mirror', *Senses of Cinema*, n. 17, November–December 2001 [www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/01/17/close_up.html].
22. Juan M. Company, 'Espera de lo invisible: *El viento nos llevará*', p. 103.
23. John Hoberman, 'Wander Land', *The Village Voice*, 26th July–1st August 2000. For his part, Jonathan Rosenbaum had been exploring since *Life and Nothing More ...* this possible comparison with Tati's films; see 'Iranian Sights: *And Life Goes On ...*', *Chicago Reader*, 23rd October 1992.
24. Alain Bergala, 'No Mother's Land', *Trafic*, n. 33, Spring 2000, p. 13.
25. Marco Dalla Gassa, *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 198.
26. Alain Bergala, 'L'Os et le pare-brise: A propos de *Le vent nous emportera* d'Abbas Kiarostami', p. 36, underlines in a timely way the relevance of this conversation in the context of the film.
27. See Marco Dalla Gassa, *Abbas Kiarostami*, pp. 196–197, who highlights the key sequence where young Farzad points in two opposite directions when Behzad asks him how to get to the school. In addition, and as he did in *Where Is the Friend's House?*, Kiarostami recreates the look of the village to suit himself, having the walls of the houses repainted on a whim as though it were a mythical land after the image of his desires; see Mojdeh Famili, 'Le Jardin du paradis dans la miniature persane et l'arbre dans le cinéma de Kiarostami', p. 162.
28. Behzad's 'ambiguous' or 'equivocal' character has been highlighted by many critics. See among others: Marco Dalla Gassa, *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 198; Charles Tesson, 'Le Secret magnifique: A propos de *Le vent nous emportera* d'Abbas Kiarostami', p. 28; Mahmood Khoshchereh, 'The Cycle of Life: *The Wind Will Carry Us*', *Film International*, n. 32, Spring–Summer 2001, p. 54; Juan M. Company, 'Espera de lo invisible: *El viento nos llevará*', p. 103; Godfrey Cheshire, 'Poetry and Sufism: A Guide to Understanding Kiarostami's Latest Film', *The Independent Weekly*, 13th December 2000; Jonathan Rosenbaum, 'The Universe in a Cellar: *The Wind Will Carry Us*', *Chicago Reader*, 8th December 2000; and David Walsh, 'A Dry Bone in a Stream: *The Wind Will Carry Us*', *World Socialist Web Site*, 28th September 1999 [www.wsws.org/articles/1999/sep1999/tff2-s28.shtml].
29. Godfrey Cheshire, 'How to Read Kiarostami', pp. 12–13.
30. Laura Mulvey, '*The Wind Will Carry us*', p. 63.
31. Jonathan Rosenbaum, 'The Universe in a Cellar: *The Wind Will Carry Us*'.
32. Charles Tesson, 'Le Secret magnifique: A propos de *Le vent nous emportera* d'Abbas Kiarostami', p. 28.
33. Comments to Thierry Jousse and Serge Toubiana, 'Un Film n'a pas de passeport: entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami', p. 32. In another interview

he also accepted that the character of Behzad resembles himself, to a considerable degree, and he added: 'What is certainly true is that I am trying to give an answer to my own questions'; see Bruno Fornara, 'Vivere il tempo. Intervista con Abbas Kiarostami', *Cineforum*, n. 388, October 1999, p. 14.

34. See Godfrey Cheshire, 'Poetry and Sufism: A Guide to Understanding Kiarostami's Latest Film', and Mahmood Khoshchereh, 'The Cycle of Life: *The Wind Will Carry Us*', p. 56.
35. Marco Dalla Gassa, *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 197.
36. Mahmood Khoshchereh, 'The Cycle of Life: *The Wind Will Carry Us*', p. 58, refers specifically to the legend of Sisyphus in interpreting the two symbolic sequences where Behzad watches the struggles of the tortoise and the beetle time and again to overcome apparently immovable obstacles. In his comments to Thierry Jousse and Serge Toubiana, 'Un Film n'a pas de passeport: Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami', p. 30, Kiarostami indirectly refers to this interpretation and does not reject it.
37. See Stéphane Goudet, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami: Les yeux du coeur', p. 12.
38. Charles Tesson, 'Le Secret magnifique: A propos de *Le vent nous emportera* d'Abbas Kiarostami', p. 29.
39. Alain Bergala, 'L'Os et le pare-brise: A propos de *Le vent nous emportera* d'Abbas Kiarostami', p. 36.
40. Youssef Ishaghpour, *Le Réel*, pp. 106–107. Ishaghpour's observation undoubtedly introduces an important nuance to the usual interpretation that many critics have made of this ending as a simple symbol of the cycle of life: see, for example, among the best texts on the subject, Laura Mulvey, '*The Wind Will Carry Us*', p. 63; Charles Tesson, 'Le Secret magnifique: A propos de *Le vent nous emportera* d'Abbas Kiarostami', p. 29; and Mahmood Khoshchereh, 'The Cycle of Life: *The Wind Will Carry Us*', p. 58.
41. Alain Bergala, 'L'Os et le pare-brise: A propos de *Le vent nous emportera* d'Abbas Kiarostami', p. 36.
42. Rashmi Doraiswamy, '*The Wind Will Carry Us*', *Cinemaya. The Asian Film Quarterly*, n. 46, Winter 1999, p. 24.
43. Carlo Chatrian, 'Il paesaggio dopo la tempestà: *Il vento ci porterà con sé*', *Cineforum*, n. 388, October 1999, p. 12.
44. Youssef Ishaghpour, *Le Réel*, p. 97.
45. Michel Ciment, 'Trente questions à Abbas Kiarostami sur ses photographies', pp. 7–8.
46. Michel Ciment, ibid., p. 20. Also Stéphane Goudet, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami: Les yeux du coeur', p. 15.
47. Abbas Kiarostami, 'La Photograhie', in Laurent Roth (ed.), *Abbas Kiarostami*, pp. 39–40.

48. Some approaches to Kiarostami's photographic work can be found in Youssef Ishaghpour, *Le Réel*, pp. 11–25; Miriam Rosen, 'Abbas Kiarostami', *Art Forum*, vol. 38, n. 7, March 2000, p. 36; and Shiva Balaghi and Anthony Shadid, 'Nature Has No Culture: The Photographs of Abbas Kiarostami', *Middle East Report*, n. 219, Summer 2001, pp. 30–33.
49. See Youssef Ishaghpour, 'La Photographie, le cinéma et le paysage. Dialogue', pp. 65–66, and his essay *La Miniature Persane. Les couleurs de la lumière: le miroir et le jardin* (Tours, Editions Farrago, 1999), pp. 46–47. It is Kiarostami himself who speaks of photography in such quasi-religious terms in the previously cited text, 'La Photographie', p. 39.
50. Quoted in the translation by Peter Avery and John Heath-Stubbs, *The Ruba'iyat of Omar Khayyam*, p. 69.
51. Several quatrains refer to this subject, but the one that is most closely related to the old man's speech would be: 'They say there is Paradise with the houris and the River / Wine freshets, milk, sweets and honey: / Fill the wine-cup, put it in my hand / Cash is better than a thousand promises'; quoted in the translation by Peter Avery and John Heath-Stubbs, *The Ruba'iyat of Omar Khayyam*, p. 69. As Marco Dalla Gassa explains so well (*Abbas Kiarostami*, pp. 210–211), the really interesting part about this use of poetry in the sequence with the country doctor is that the verses quoted, far from being a purely verbal instrument, are powerfully reflected in the images.
52. Alain Masson, '*Le Vent nous emportera*', *Positif*, n. 466, diciembre de 1999, p. 8.
53. The best study of her work remains, by a long way, that of Michael C. Hillmann, *A Lonely Woman: Forugh Farrokhzad and Her Poetry* (Washington, Three Continents Press/Mage Publishers, 1987).
54. Stefano Cappellini, '"Il mio cinema in divenire": intervista ad Abbas Kiarostami' [www.close-up.it/frontpage/13-99fp/Venezia/Recensioni/IlVentoCiPorteraVia.html].
55. Stéphane Goudet, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami: Les yeux du coeur', p. 11.
56. Charles Tesson, 'Le Secret magnifique: A propos de *Le vent nous emportera* d'Abbas Kiarostami', p. 28.
57. The passage is taken from the poem *Gift*, quoted in the translation by Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, *An Anthology of Modern Persian Poetry* (Boulder, Westview Press, 1978), p. 146.
58. Forugh Farrokhzad's liking for the constant repetition of words and expressions in her poems could be related to the no-less-daring habit of Kiarostami's of using all kinds of repetition – including verbal ones – as a stylistic feature in his films. Ahmad Amini and Gholam Heidari, 'One Hundred Years, One Hundred Films: Part One', *Film International*, n.

30–31, Winter 2001, p. 40, suggest another possible similarity in the form of self-referentiality: in the same way as many of Forugh Farrokhzad's poems begin with the final verse of a previous one, so Kiarostami tends to use similar devices in his films (in this case, for example, beginning the film with a quotation from the same Sepehri poem that formed the background to *Where Is the Friend's House?).* Finally, the Kiarostami poem used to head the first chapter of this book includes, evidently, an express tribute to Farrokhzad.

59. Quoted in the translation by Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak (*An Anthology of Modern Persian Poetry*, p. 141), who prefers to translate the title as *The Wind Will Take Us* instead of as *The Wind Will Carry Us.*
60. Juan M. Company, 'Espera de lo invisible: *El viento nos llevará*', p. 103. Attributing to Kiarostami an 'anthropological vision' is certainly not without its difficulties, but the meaning of Company's remark is clear and penetrating.
61. *The Wind Will Carry Us* in fact started off a small round of interesting views of this region, led by *Blackboards* (*Takhte Siah*, 2000), by Samira Makhmalbaf, and *A Time for Drunken Horses* (*Zamani barayé masti absha*, 2000), by Bahman Ghobadi, Kiarostami's assistant on this film, in which he also played the part of Yussef, the gravedigger.
62. Bruno Fornara, 'Vivere il tempo. Intervista con Abbas Kiarostami', pp. 13–14. Elsewhere Kiarostami put his response in a different way: 'If audiences have the impression they are getting a political message, that is up to them'; quoted by John Hoberman, 'Wander Land', *The Village Voice*, 26th July–1st August 2000.
63. Comments to Heike Hurst, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami', p. 19.
64. Marco Dalla Gassa, *Abbas Kiarostami*, pp. 198 and 213–214.
65. Alain Bergala, 'L'Os et le pare-brise: A propos de *Le vent nous emportera* d'Abbas Kiarostami', p. 35.
66. Youssef Ishaghpour, *Le Réel*, pp. 79 and 100.
67. Youssef Ishaghpour, ibid., pp. 100–101.
68. Deborah Young, '*The Wind Will Carry us*', *Variety*, 13th–19th September 1999, p. 46.
69. David Walsh, 'A Dry Bone in a Stream: *The Wind Will Carry us*'.
70. Marco Dalla Gassa, *Abbas Kiarostami*, pp. 198–199.
71. See Thierry Jousse and Serge Toubiana, 'Un Film n'a pas de passeport: Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami', pp. 31 and 33, and Stéphane Goudet, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami: Les yeux du coeur', p. 9.
72. Stéphane Goudet, ibid., p. 14.
73. In this case, the difficulties arose – according to diverse sources and just as varied rumours – from the poem by Khayyam quoted by the country doctor towards the end of the film and from the sequence in the cellar where Behzad recites a poem by Forugh Farrokhzad while the girl is getting

the cow ready to milk. However, and as Mehrnaz Saeed-Vafa points out, the film does not seem to have been formally banned at any time, and the fact that it has still not yet been shown commercially in Iran seems to be due more to the exhibitors' expectations of low box-office takings; see Mehrnaz Saeed-Vafa and Jonathan Rosenbaum, 'Abbas Kiarostami: A Dialogue Between the Authors (Chicago, September 3rd, 2001)', *Senses of Cinema*, n. 17, November–December 2001 [www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/01/17/ kiarostami_authors.html]. In any event, the film was shown with no difficulty during the retrospective devoted to Kiarostami at the Tehran Film Festival in February 2000.

74. Juan M. Company, 'Espera de lo invisible: *El viento nos llevará*', p. 103.
75. The images of the fax at the beginning of *ABC Africa* refer explicitly back to the machine typing out the credits of *The Report*, although obviously its function has changed.
76. The complete text of the IFAD fax is included in *Film International*, n. 30–31, Autumn 2000–Winter 2001, p. 106.
77. See, for example, in this respect, Kiarostami's comments to Scott Foundas, 'Films without Borders: Abbas Kiarostami Talks about *ABC Africa* and Poetic Cinema', *IndieWire*, 16th May 2001 [www.indiewire.com/film/interviews/int_Kiarostami_Abb_010516.html].
78. Omid Rohani, 'An Interview with Abbas Kiarostami about His New Film, *ABC Africa*', *Sinema-ye Jahan* [Cinema World], vol. 1, n. 1, March 2001, p. 15, reproduced in *NetIran* [www.netiran.com/Htdocs/Clippings/Art/010308XXAR01.html].
79. Olivier Joyard, 'Chimères humanitaires', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, n. 558, June 2001, p. 17. See also Luciano Barisone, '*ABC Africa*, di Abbas Kiarostami', *Cineforum*, n. 406, July 2001, p. 57.
80. Jean-Sébastien Chauvin, 'Kiarostami en liberté: *ABC Africa* d'Abbas Kiarostami', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, n. 561, October 2001, p. 78.
81. Stéphane Goudet, '*ABC Africa* et *Kandahar*: Vivre', *Positif*, n. 489, November 2001, p. 55.
82. For Kiarostami's enthusiastic opinion, see Stéphane Goudet, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami: Les yeux du coeur', p. 11.
83. See Scott Foundas, '*ABC Africa*', *Variety*, 14th –20th May 2001, p. 23, and Jonathan Rosenbaum, 'Life and Nothing More: Abbas Kiarostami's African Musical', *Film Comment*, vol. 37, n. 5, September–October 2001, p. 20.
84. See, for example, Omid Rohani, 'An Interview with Abbas Kiarostami about His New Film, *ABC Africa*'.
85. Olivier Joyard, 'Chimères humanitaires', p. 17.
86. Jonathan Rosenbaum, 'Life and Nothing More: Abbas Kiarostami's African Musical', p. 20, lays particular emphasis on this unexpected feature of *ABC Africa.*

87. Stéphane Goudet, '*ABC Africa* et *Kandahar*: Vivre', p. 54.
88. Olivier Joyard, 'Chimères humanitaires', p. 17.
89. Luciano Barisone, '*ABC Africa*, di Abbas Kiarostami', pp. 57–58.
90. Stéphane Goudet, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami: Manipulations', p. 100.
91. Comments to Scott Foundas, 'Films without Borders: Abbas Kiarostami Talks about *ABC Africa* and Poetic Cinema'.
92. Matthieu Darras, '*Ten*', *Positif*, n. 497–498, July–August 2002, p. 95.
93. '*Ten* par Abbas Kiarostami', official website of the film [www.mk2.com/ten/home.html].
94. Ibid.
95. Comments to Michèle Levieux, 'Abbas Kiarostami ou comment laisser le cinéma mener le cinéaste', *L'Humanité*, 25th May 2002.
96. Matthieu Darras, '*Ten*', p. 95.
97. After winning the Jury's Grand Prize at the Venice Film Festival in 1999 for *The Wind Will Carry Us*, Kiarostami had declared his intention of never competing again in [film] festivals, believing that this was a part of his career that had run its course and which it made no sense to continue. See, among others, his comments to Thierry Jousse and Serge Toubiana, 'Un Film n'a pas de passeport: Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami', p. 30, and Stéphane Goudet, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami: Les yeux du coeur', p. 15.
98. Olivier Joyard and Patrice Blouin, 'Dix raisons d'aimer *Ten*', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, n. 569, June 2002, p. 29. Also Jean-Michel Frodon, '*Ten*: Un portrait de femme en dix fragments dans l'Iran d'aujourd'hui', *Le Monde*, 21st May 2002.
99. On the scarce appearance of the city in Kiarostami's films, see Mojdeh Famili, 'Kiarostami: Entre réel et imaginaire', *Drôle d'époque*, n. 4, Spring 1999, pp. 141–145.
100. See, for example, Bruno Fornara, 'Vivere il tempo. Intervista con Abbas Kiarostami', p. 14.
101. Interview with Michèle Levieux, 'Abbas Kiarostami ou comment laisser le cinéma mener le cinéaste'.
102. Emmanuèle Frois, 'Kiarostami rencontre la femme iranienne', *Le Figaro*, 21st May 2002.
103. Ibid.
104. See Laura Mulvey, '*The Wind Will Carry Us*', p. 63, and Rashmi Doraiswamy, '*The Wind Will Carry Us*', p. 24.
105. Leonardo Gandini, '*Ten*, di Abbas Kiarostami', *Cineforum*, n. 416, July 2002, p. 25.
106. See in this regard the pertinent remarks of Olivier Joyard and Patrice Blouin, 'Dix raisons d'aimer *Ten*', p. 29, and Leonardo Gandini, ibid., p. 25.

107. In the same way as Kiarostami was able to compare himself with some of the female characters in *The Wind Will Carry us* (see Thierry Jousse and Serge Toubiana, 'Un Film n'a pas de passeport: Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami', p. 32), the protagonist of *Ten* can also be considered in many ways a likeness of the director himself. Olivier Joyard and Patrice Blouin, 'Dix raisons d'aimer *Ten*', p. 29, go so far as to interpret Kiarostami's persistent showing of the protagonist wearing sunglasses in many sequences of the film as an obvious 'wink' on Kiarostami's part.
108. For an incisive analysis of this sequence, see Olivier Joyard and Patrice Blouin, 'Dix raisons d'aimer *Ten*', p. 29.
109. The ban on showing women's bare heads in public – and therefore also on screen – had already been contravened in this way by Maryam Shahriar in *Daughters of the Sun* (*Dokhtaran-e khorshid*, 2000), a film of limited interest, which nevertheless caused a great commotion in Iran when it was first screened.
110. This is essentially the argument put forward by the sociologist Fariba Adelkhah in her influential *Etre moderne en Iran* (Paris, Editions Karthala, 1998) to explain the many contradictions of modern Iran since the election of Mohammad Khatami as President of the Islamic Republic in 1997. Fariba Adelkhah is also the author of an interesting study on the situation of women in post-revolutionary Iran, *La Révolution sous le voile* (Paris, Editions Karthala, 1991), which would nevertheless require substantial updating.
111. '*Ten* par Abbas Kiarostami', official website of the film [www.mk2.com/ten/home.html].
112. An interesting precedent can be found, however, in Kiarostami's contribution to the documentary *La Leçon de cinéma* (Mojdeh Famili, 2002), where the director explains his points of view based on the experience of making *The Wind Will Carry Us*.
113. Dan Fainaru, '*10 on Ten*', *Screen International*, 14th May 2004, p. 18.
114. In a more recent interview, however, Kiarostami sensibly (and amusingly) pointed out some of the adverse effects of the proliferation of films using digital video: 'At first I thought it would be a great help to youngsters starting out. Now I have seen such terrible films on DV that I think it is a menace. They ought to give out licences to use it, like licences to carry arms'; interview with Miguel Mora, 'Las películas buenas son las que se pueden ver 25 veces', *El País*, 15th May 2004, p. 44.
115. Kiarostami's statement is included in Alberto Barbera and Elisa Resegotti (eds), *Kiarostami* (Milan and Turin, Electa-Museo Nazionale del Cinema, 2003), p. 174.
116. Alain Bergala, 'Abbas Kiarostami: Les pleins pouvoirs du cinéma', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, n. 590, May 2004, pp. 44–45.
117. Kiarostami's statement is included in Alberto Barbera and Elisa Resegotti (eds), *Kiarostami*, p. 172.

118. Kiarostami's statement in Alberto Barbera and Elisa Resegotti (eds), *Kiarostami*, p. 174, was reprinted in the press folder of MK2/Galerie de France on the occasion of the presentation of the film at the 2004 Cannes Festival and the inauguration of a new exhibition of photographs in Paris.
119. Geoff Andrew, 'Long and Winding Roads', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 13, n. 11, November 2003, p. 5.
120. Alain Bergala, 'Abbas Kiarostami: Les pleins pouvoirs du cinéma', p. 45.
121. Stéphane Goudet, '*Five* d'Abbas Kiarostami: Ciné-poèmes', *Positif*, n. 519, May 2004, pp. 55-57.
122. Interview with Miguel Mora, 'Las películas buenas son las que se pueden ver 25 veces', *El País*, 15th May 2004, p. 44.
123. Jonathan Romney, 'De rigueur digitale', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 14, n. 7, July 2004, p. 20.
124. See Jonathan Romney, 'De rigueur digitale', p. 20 ; Alain Bergala, 'Abbas Kiarostami: Les pleins pouvoirs du cinéma', p. 46 ; and Stéphane Goudet, '*Five* d'Abbas Kiarostami: Ciné-poèmes', p. 55.
125. Alain Bergala, ibid.

Chapter Six

1. Jared Rapfogel, 'A Mirror Facing a Mirror', *Senses of Cinema*, n. 17, November–December 2001 [www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/01/17/close_up.html].
2. Laurence Giavarini and Thierry Jousse, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami', pp. 34–35.
3. Stéphane Goudet, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami: Manipulations', p. 98.
4. Fergus Daly, 'Abbas Kiarostami: The Mirror of Possible Worlds', *Film West. Ireland's Film Quarterly*, n. 32, May 1998, pp. 34–37.
5. Godfrey Cheshire, 'How to Read Kiarostami', p. 9.
6. Nassia Hamid, 'Near and Far. Interview', p. 22.
7. Marco Dalla Gassa, *Abbas Kiarostami*, pp. 154–156.
8. Mir-Ahmad-e Mir-Ehsan, 'Dark Light', in Rose Issa and Sheila Whitaker (eds), *Life and Art: The New Iranian Cinema*, p. 113.
9. Sylvie Rollet, 'Une Esthétique de la trace', *Positif*, n. 442, December 1997, p. 92.
10. The classic treatment of this subject remains that of Oleg Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1973), pp. 75–103.
11. Sylvie Rollet, ibid.
12. See Laura Mulvey, 'Kiarostami's Uncertainty Principle', pp. 24–27. The expression had nevertheless already been employed, to the same purpose, by David Oubiña, 'Algunas reflexiones sobre un plano en un film de un cineasta iraní', pp. 23–24.
13. Sylvie Rollet, ibid., p. 93.
14. See Bruno Roberti, 'Il sogno della verità e la verità dei sogni', in Bruno Roberti (ed.), *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 5, and Youssef Ishaghpour, *Le Réel*, p. 35.
15. Peter Rist, 'Meeting Abbas Kiarostami', *Offscreen*, 6th March 2001 [www.horschamp.qc.ca/ new_offscreen/kiarostami.html].
16. Michel Boujut, 'Abbas Kiarostami: Comment peut-on être un cinéaste persan?', *L'Evenement du Jeudi*, 14th–20th May 1992, p. 141.
17. Kiarostami himself drew this analogy in comments he made in 1994 and reproduced in 'Quotations from Abbas Kiarostami, 1978–1999', *Film International*, n. 25, Summer 1999, p. 26.
18. Nassia Hamid, 'Near and Far. Interview', p. 24. On this 're-education of the gaze', see Alain Bergala, 'L'Os et le pare-brise: A propos de *Le vent nous emportera* d'Abbas Kiarostami', p. 34.
19. Gilberto Perez, 'Film in Review: The Edges of Realism', p. 177.
20. See in particular his comments to Nassia Hamid, ibid., p. 24. The most important reference work on the *tazieh* remains Peter J. Chelkowski (ed.), *Ta'ziyeh: Ritual and Drama in Iran* (New York, New York University Press, 1979).
21. See his comments to Jean-Luc Nancy, 'Conversation entre Abbas Kiarostami et Jean-Luc Nancy', in Jean-Luc Nancy, *L'Evidence du film: Abbas Kiarostami*, pp. 89–91.
22. *Hamrah ba bad* (*With the Wind*) (Tehran, Nashr-e Honar-e Iran, 2000). A complete list of the various translations appears in the bibliography to this book.
23. David Sterritt, 'With Borrowed Eyes: Abbas Kiarostami Talks', p. 22.
24. Comments made during the presentation of the Italian edition of his first book of poems, *Con il vento. Poesie* (Milan, Editrice Il Castoro, 2001), at the Torino Film Festival, 19th November 2001.
25. Elaine Sciolino, *Persian Mirrors. The Elusive Face of Iran* (New York, Touchstone Books, 2000), p. 158.
26. Thierry Jousse and Serge Toubiana, 'Un Film n'a pas de passeport: Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami', p. 31.
27. 'Intervista con Mohsen Makhmalbaf', in Francesco Bono (ed.), *L'Iran e i suoi schermi* (Venice and Pesaro, Marsilio Editori/Mostra Internazionale del Nuovo Cinema, 1990), p. 168.
28. Youssef Ishaghpour, *Le Réel*, p. 101.
29. Mokhdeh Famili, 'Le Jardin du paradis dans la miniature persane et l'arbre dans le cinéma de Kiarostami', p. 152.
30. Farhad Khosrokhavar and Olivier Roy, *Iran: Comment sortir d'une révolution religieuse*, pp. 81–82, explain the growing tendency among modern 'post-

Islamic intellectuals' to reinterpret the Persian poetic tradition in precisely these terms, which are entirely consistent with the idea of a 'pleasurable Islam'.

31. Riccardo Zipoli, 'Analisi delle poesie', appendix to Abbas Kiarostami, *Walking with the Wind*, pp. 258–261. See also Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak and Michael Beard, 'Introduction' to *Walking with the Wind. Poems by Abbas Kiarostami* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, Harvard Film Archive, 2001), pp. 8–13.
32. 'Le Passager', *Trafic*, n. 2, Spring 1992, pp. 71–73, the first of his texts translated in the Western world (and which, despite the title, is not at all related to his early film), simply describes his admiration for Akhavan-Saless, whom he spent several hours watching unobserved in the departure lounge of an airport where they both happened to be waiting.
33. 'The haiku in its expressive brevity is pure imagery, the impact of a deeply felt moment. Through it the poet wishes to see and feel the essence of his experience. The haiku is thus a symbol of an intuitive vision of reality, which at times carries religious and ethical values', wrote Fernando Rodríguez-Izquierdo, *El haiku japonés. Historia y traducción* (Madrid, Ediciones Hiperión, 1999; original edition, 1972), p. 22, in a description that undoubtedly applies equally to Kiarostami's poems. On this connection with the *haiku*, which is also significantly a feature of the work of his admired Sepehri, see also again the indispensable 'Analisi delle poesie' by Riccardo Zipoli, pp. 262–266.
34. Morteza Kakhi, 'Flight of Fancy in Kiarostami's Poetry', *Film International*, n. 29, Summer 2000, p. 11. The *shatkhiyat*, sayings of a paradoxical nature that defy rational explanation, and which usually refer to visionary and mystical experiences, are discussed by Annemarie Schimmel, *As Through a Veil. Mystical Poetry in Islam* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1982), pp. 16, 163 and 217–218.
35. Godfrey Cheshire, 'How to Read Kiarostami', p. 11.
36. Comments made during the presentation of *Con il vento. Poesie* at the Torino Film Festival, 19th November 2001.
37. Riccardo Zipoli, ibid., pp. 266–278.
38. Hamid Dabashi, 'Re-reading Reality: Kiarostami's *Through the Olive Trees* and the Cultural Politics of Postrevolutionary Aesthetics', pp. 83–87. Over the course of time, and with the evolution of Kiarostami's film-making, Dabashi reconsidered his positive views about Kiarostami's films and launched a scathing – and unjustified – attack on *The Wind Will Carry Us* in his book *Close Up: Iranian Cinema, Past, Present and Future*, pp. 251–258.
39. Youssef Ishaghpour, *Le Réel*, pp. 57–59.
40. E.M. Cioran, *Syllogismes de l'amertume* (Paris, Editions Gallimard, 1952), p. 20.

41. Hamid Dabashi, 'Re-reading Realuity', p. 84.
42. ibid.
43. See, for example, the thoughts of Mir-Ahmad-e Mir-Ehsan, 'Dark Light', pp. 109–113, and Fergus Daly, 'Abbas Kiarostami: The Mirror of Possible Worlds', p. 37.
44. Nassia Hamid, 'Near and Far. Interview', p. 24.
45. Quoted in the translation by Martin Turner and Abbas Faiz, 'Shorab Sepehri's *Water's Footfall*', *Comparative Criticism*, vol. 8 (1986), pp. 261–277, included in www.50connect.co.uk/turner/persian/ persianSS13.html.
46. Youssef Ishaghpour, *Le Réel*, pp. 53–83. The original French reads 'I'en deçà de l'histoire'.
47. David Walsh, 'The Compassionate Gaze: Iranian Filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami at the San Francisco Film Festival', *World Socialist Web Site*, 12th June 2000 [www.wsws.org /articles/2000/jun2000/sff8-j12.shtml].
48. For a (pen)ultimate tirade, see Azadeh Farahmand, 'Perspectives on Recent (International Acclaim for) Iranian Cinema, in Richard Tapper (ed.), *The New Iranian Cinema: Politics, Representation and Identity*, pp. 98–101.
49. Laurence Giavarini and Thierry Jousse, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami', p. 35.
50. Pat Aufderheide, 'Real Life Is More Important than Cinema: An Interview with Abbas Kiarostami', p. 32.
51. Gilles Deleuze, *L'Image-temps. Cinéma 2* (Paris, Les Editions de Minuit, 1985), pp. 282 and 288. An astute consideration of the political side to Kiarostami's films can be found in Marco Dalla Gassa, *Abbas Kiarostami*, pp. 56–60.
52. Stéphane Goudet, 'Entretien avec Abbas Kiarostami: Manipulations', p. 99.
53. The concept of 'internal exile' in relation to Kiarostami is formulated by Youssef Ishaghpour, *Le Réel*, p. 97.
54. Laurent Roth, 'Abbas Kiarostami: Le dompteur de regard', in Laurent Roth (ed.), *Abbas Kiarostami*, p. 9.
55. Conversation with Youssef Ishaghpour, 'La Photographie, le cinéma et le paysage. Dialogue', p. 65.
56. See, for example, the comments included in 'Quotations from Abbas Kiarostami, 1978–1999', p. 27.
57. Patrick Z. McGavin, 'Kiarostami Will Carry us: The Iranian Master Gives Hope', *IndieWire*, 1st August 2000 [www.indiewire.com/film/interviews/int_Kiarostam_Abbas_000801.html]. And during a different interview, slightly earlier, when he was asked about the situation in Khatami's Iran, he said quite specifically: 'Iran does not belong to Khatami. He is in power because twenty million people voted for him. Khatami wants to make changes: if he succeeds, he will have followed the wishes of the majority of

Iranians'; see Stefano Cappellini, '"Il mio cinema in divenire": intervista ad Abbas Kiarostami' [www.close-up.it/frontpage/13-99fp/Venezia/Recensioni/IlVentoCiPorteraVia.html].

58. Abbas Kiarostami, 'I figli della rivoluzione', *La Repubblica*, 15th July 1999.
59. Bruno Fornara, 'Vivere il tempo. Intervista con Abbas Kiarostami', p. 15.

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